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The treatment of the aged poor in five selected West Kent parishes from Settlement to Speenhamland (1662-1797)

Thesis

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

This thesis breaks new ground in Poor Law Studies.

It isolates for detailed scrutiny the treatment of a particular social group, the aged poor. Traditional sources have been approached for new answers to new questions, and in so doing, new methods of source exploitation have been evolved and utilised.

The sources have been asked to provide information about dependent old age; the relationship between poverty and the length of the working life; sex differences; the proportion of the population which ended life as parish paupers. Key research has centred around the parish pension, its function, size and real value; crucially, the ability or otherwise of the pensioner to subsist on it.

Consideration has also been given to the other components of the network of relief measures adopted by the parishes; relief in kind; housing and the standard of living; medical and nursing care; the role of the workhouse. The investigation has been carried beyond the limits of relief provided by the mechanisms of the Old Poor Law alone, to include external supportive agencies, such as the support of family and charity, which includes both charitable trusts and indiscriminate giving. Some light is thrown on ways the aged contributed to their own maintenance.

The thesis tests the general hypothesis that all these various supportive systems produced an interlocking apparatus which involved the whole community in the support of the old, while to discuss their treatment within the limits of the poor law only, results in a narrow, incomplete and distorted narrative, serving only to perpetuate the traditional historical view of a harsh, punitive treatment, needing reassessment in the light of recent historical developments.

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THE TREATMENT OF THE AGED POOR
IN FIVE SELECTED WEST KENT
PARISHES FROM SETTLEMENT TO
SPEENHAMLAND
(1 6 6 2 - 1 7 9 7)

This thesis is presented for the award of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (Ph.D.)
by the Open University

It is purely the result of the author's own researches
and contains nothing which is the work of others, except by
way of reference or comparison.

Submitted on *July 29th 1988*

by Mary Barker-Read, B.A. (Hons. Open)

Signed *M. Barker-Read*

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CONVERSIONS - £. s. d. / £.p COMPARISONS

Money transactions are given throughout in old currency for the sake of convenience and consistency. Conversion to decimal currency should present no difficulties with the aid of the conversion tables below.

<u>OLD PENCE (d)</u>	<u>NEW PENCE (p)</u>
1/2d	-
1d	1/2p
2d	1p
3d	1p
4d	1 1/2p
5d	2p
6d	2 1/2p
7d	3p
8d	3 1/2p
9d	4p
10d	4p
11d	4 1/2p
12d	5p

12 pence (d) is one shilling; twenty shillings is one pound. 100 pence (p) is one pound.

SHILLINGS. EQUIVALENTS IN PENCE (p)

1 shilling (s)	5p
2s0d	10p
2s6d	12 1/2p
3s0d	15p
5s0d	25p
7s0d	35p
10s0d	50p
15s0d	75p
18s0d	90p
19s0d	95p
20s0d (1 pound)	100p (1 pound)

CHAPTER ONE - ISSUES AND APPROACHES

There have been few, if any, studies of the treatment of the aged poor in England under the Old Poor Law, distinguishing clearly between the role of the parish as it carried out its responsibilities under the law, including the provision of workhouses, from the contribution made by their families and other external agencies such as charitable trusts. Nor has any attempt been made to ascertain how many old there really were, what contribution they were able to make towards their own support by self help or paid work; nor whether they had any useful role left to play in their communities

As far as is known, the Old Poor Law has hitherto been examined in one of two ways: either as a straightforward dissertation on administration and practice in a selected region over a period of time, ⁽¹⁾ or more recently within a theoretical framework, where hypothesis testing assumes an important place, and a quantitative approach is predominant.⁽²⁾ As far as social groups within the Poor Law are concerned, attention has been focused mainly on the able-bodied, their fecundity, their tendency to riot in times of stress and their relationship to the

-
1. G. Oxley. Unpub. M.A.Thesis. Liverpool 1966. The Administration of the Poor laws in the West Derby Hundred of Lancashire. 1607 - 1837.
 2. J.D.Huzel. Unpub. PhD Thesis. Kent 1975. Aspects of the Old Poor Law, Population and Agrarian Protest in Early Nineteenth Century England, with particular reference to the County of Kent.

Malthusian propositions of poverty creation and population growth. ⁽¹⁾

Isolating the aged as a social group among parish paupers in order to throw some light on their treatment seems, therefore, to be breaking new ground. It is to be seen as part of a general hypothesis that, a proper assessment of the success or failure of the Old Poor Laws cannot be made until all those groups subject to their operation, the old, the widows, the parish orphans and others have been identified and studied. Until there are many such studies available for comparison, all statements made about the treatment of the poor are only tentative conclusions, sometimes misleading and occasionally wrong. The workhouse may be taken as an example. This institution, both as the eighteenth century un-reformed model, or as the post 1834 pattern, assumes enormous importance in the history as well as in the mythology of the aged poor. The nineteenth century workhouse is outside our period, but was the eighteenth century model, incorporated into relief programmes after 1723 ⁽²⁾ the unmitigated failure it has often been claimed to be? ⁽³⁾ Were the poor really herded into them, young and old, able bodied, sick and handicapped, to be set on productive work under

1. G.Body. Unpub. PhD Thesis. Southampton 1964. The Administration of the Poor Law in Dorset, 1760 - 1834, with special reference to the Able-bodied Labourers.

2. The Knatchbull General Workhouse Act. 9 Geo.1.c 7.

3. S. and B. Webb The History of Local Government in England Vol.VII. Part I. The Old Poor Law. London 1926. pp253-260

intolerable conditions under cruel contractors? We do not really know.

It follows that a re-evaluation of the operation of the Poor Laws may be overdue. The last half century has seen an enormous increase in the amount of research material becoming available. New techniques have also been developed to exploit this material. These include quantitative approaches in historical demography; of hypothesis testing within a theoretical framework and greater use of statistical analysis, all suggesting that the generalisations and conclusions put forward more than fifty years ago should now be re-examined and confirmed, qualified or discarded where necessary in the light of new evidence.

This thesis is a small step in that direction.

The dissertation proposes to examine in some detail the treatment of the aged poor in five selected parishes in the West Kent region between the passing of the first of the Settlement Acts and the Speenhamland judgement; that is between 1662 and 1795. This is a long time span, but a necessary one if the questions to be asked of the evidence available are to be adequately answered. A recent estimate of the percentage of over 60's in the population of England and Wales, between about 1540 and 1871, indicates that except for one quinquennium, 1716 to 1720, it remained well below ten per cent.⁽¹⁾ Since this spans the whole population, a very much smaller proportion could be expected

1. E.A.Wrigley and R.G.Schofield. The Population History of England and Wales. London 1982. pp 528-529

to end their days as parish paupers. The certainty of finding enough aged for a feasible study was one factor in selecting a long time span. Further it opened up the possibility of detecting changes in both attitudes and treatment over time, and of comparing practices in one parish with another. As the pension life of individual persons would by the nature of things be short, a long perspective would make for a better assessment. Settlement and Speenhamland in themselves will play little part in the discussion. Any settlement difficulties among the old would in the majority of cases have been resolved long before the question of pensions arose. Those still remaining would be dealt with at the time. Kent was not a 'Speenhamland county'. It is the rapid deterioration in the primary sources; in their quality and uselessness in identification of the old around this time that makes Speenhamland a natural stopping point.

The main body of evidence about the aged poor comes from the parish records of five parishes disposed across West Kent. For the present purposes the term 'West Kent' is restricted to an area of about one hundred square miles, lying in a rough arc, with its base along the Kent Sussex border, from the Surrey edge in the west to Tenterden in the east. The remaining boundary curves northwards from both extremities, to the foot of the North Downs, enclosing the Kentish Weald. Maidstone forms the natural centre of the region.

Five was considered the maximum number of parishes that could be subjected to adequate scrutiny in depth over such a long period. They are:

Cowden
Cranbrook
Maidstone
Tonbridge
Wrotham

They were chosen for the following reasons.

They had good poor law records, dating from a sufficiently early date to make the study credible, and containing few gaps by way of lost or indecipherable pages. They were well dispersed across the region to allow of differing attitudes, customs and practices, enabling comparisons to be made as appropriate. Each parish had a large enough population at the beginning of the period to ensure that there would be enough old among them to isolate. Lastly, they seemed to provide a balance between large and small parishes, rural and urban, rich and poor, densely populated or sparsely populated. All these factors could affect the way in which the old were treated. Further discussion of these parishes will take place in the next chapter where the geographical context, the social and economic background, the framework of the Old Poor Law and other factors of the situation in which the aged lived out their lives as parish paupers are examined.

In this mix of parishes Cowden and Wrotham were entirely rural, Tonbridge and Cranbrook both had large rural hinterlands. The former had a tiny urban settlement of about a hundred and forty houses, while the latter, the former

centre of the Kent Broadcloth industry, had a decaying town whose population had halved in a century. The inability of former clothworkers to re-establish themselves in other kinds of work, the high mobility of skilled workers to other cloth working centres, followed by tradesmen who could no longer make a living, left a parish bereft of work and large numbers of poor of all ages, rooted there by their inability to move elsewhere. This is a situation in which the aged could be neglected, treated harshly or cruelly. The effect on their life span could produce interesting results.

Cowden and Wrotham with their widely dispersed populations and few old are likely to have been more caring and generous, since they are less likely to have been missed by the parish officers.

Maidstone was the only really urban parish, consisting of a small rural perimeter and a rapidly growing, densely populated overcrowded town. Increasing commercial wealth and growing administrative importance attracted large numbers of new residents, rich and poor. Poor immigrants finding work were allowed to remain unmolested on production of their parish certificate.

Both Maidstone and Tonbridge had a wealth of charitable endowments for the poor and these should have been able to produce a considerable improvement in the lot of the aged. All five parishes had suffered to varying degrees by the decay of cloth making and iron working and pockets of poverty involving the old may be expected in the more urban

parts, until the replacement industries, hops, brewing and fruit culture were sufficiently developed to absorb those who wanted work, including the capable old.

Conclusions reached on the treatment of the aged poor, based on five parishes in a circumscribed area of West Kent, may appear too small in scope to have any wider significance. Have they any relevance to Kent as a whole, or more importantly, to the 15,000 parishes nationally ? This could prove disadvantageous.

Attention has already been drawn to the complete lack of similar studies, focusing not only on the treatment of the old but on other pauper groups. One of the objectives of the research has been to provide pointers towards future work in the same field, enabling the massive surviving records of the Old Poor Law to be exploited in new and fruitful ways. A new assessment of its operations may lead to a new appreciation of its achievements.

Since there were no guidelines to follow and no prototypes to consult, the complexities of formulating ones own methods of exploiting the sources, of developing suitable techniques for studying and analysing the data were very time consuming. Five parishes were, therefore, considered to be the maximum number that could be satisfactorily handled. The evidence has been widened by the use of material from other parishes in Kent, and, where applicable, by comparison with the findings of researchers in other parts of the country. The significance of this particular study will be increased as others follow and

conclusions can be compared in different regions.

The bulk of the primary source material used consisted of the overseers accounts of these five parishes, supplemented by the parish registers. Other nearby parishes occasionally provided additional material in which the key parishes were deficient. Chiddingstone, for example, a small parish adjacent to Cowden and eight miles north west of Tonbridge, has poor relief records, in occasional runs of years, dating from the middle of the sixteenth century. These three parishes, over the time period under consideration, had continuous interconnections, social, economic and through the judiciary. The practices and patterns of relief for the old which were in operation in Chiddingstone at this early date could well have been similar to those in operation elsewhere, and throw light on the evolution of the forms of relief which became customary under the Old Poor Law ⁽¹⁾

Shorne, in the north west corner of the region, has a well preserved series of overseers' accounts for seven years from 1597, the year in which overseers of the poor were first appointed. These provide clear evidence of the role played by the justices in identifying and supervising the treatment of the old, as distinct from other poor. ⁽²⁾

1. (K)ent (A)rchives (O)ffice P 89/12/1.

2. K.A.O. P 336/1-2

Workhouse records have not been well preserved in the chosen parishes, but there are good surviving records for other parishes in the same region. While these will illuminate workhouse regimens in parishes such as Dartford, Farnborough, Strood and Goudhurst, they will provide a sound basis for speculation as to what happened to the aged once they were admitted into the workhouses of the key parishes.⁽¹⁾

Other primary sources have been drawn upon to provide a variety of information which has a bearing on the treatment of the aged. Among these are the records of Quarter and Petty Sessions, Vestry Minutes, Settlement certificates, Articles of agreement and other miscellaneous documents. All such sources will be acknowledged in the main body of the text.

A different category of source material used consists of the Hearth Tax Returns of 1664 for Kent.⁽²⁾ They are particularly well preserved and have been used in this instance, as in many other research projects, to provide estimates of the populations of the parishes under scrutiny at the beginning of the period. By adopting the customary habit of regarding all non chargeable households as being close to, or even below the current idea of a subsistence

1. K.A.O. P 110/18/7 Dartford. P 47/18/2 Farnborough.
P 157/12/1 Goudhurst.
ANON. An Account of Several Workhouses. Lond 1725
pp 18-20 (for accounts of Strood and Maidstone
workhouses)

2. K.A.O. Q/Rth.

level, they have also been used to determine the extent of poverty in the parishes, and with a view of finding out how many of the non chargeable were likely to end their days as parish pensioners. Two tables which accompany this chapter illustrate the ways in which the Hearth Tax Returns of 1664 for the five Kentish parishes were used to provide source material for this study have been used.

Table 1.1 lists the total number of households in each parish, the number chargeable and those which were non chargeable. The percentage of non chargeable households will be taken in future calculations to be a measure of the proportion of the population living at, or very near to, or even below, subsistence level.

Table 1.2 estimates the parish populations in 1664 by using the Hearth Tax. This has customarily been achieved by multiplying the number of households by a number representing the mean household size. The latter figure has varied down the years, due to various ways of calculating it. The present 4.75 is that derived by the most modern calculations of demographers.

Much background reading of general, social and economic histories has helped to place the main theme into a proper perspective. Previous writers on the poor law have been consulted for their approach to, and their interpretation of, its administration in relation to the aged poor. Full credit will be given to these in the references, but there may well be some differences in the conclusions reached in the light of the West Kent evidence, and through new ways of

Table 1.1

ANALYSIS OF HEARTH TAX RETURNS 1664

PARISH	HOUSEHOLDS		TOTAL HOUSEHOLDS	% NON CHARG'LE
	CHARGEABLE	NON CHARG'LE		
Cowden *	56 estimates only	19	75	26.0
Cranbrook Town	121	165	286	58.0
Parish	282	192	474	40.5
Maidstone Town	405	399	804	49.6
Parish	276	565	1246	37.5
Tonbridge Town	69	70	139	50.4
Parish	230	143	378	38.3
Wrotham	231	130	461	28.2

Prepared from Kent Returns. K.A.O. Q/RTh

* Cowden assesement included in Hundred of Somerden.

Table 1.2

ESTIMATION OF POPULATIONS OF PARISHES USING
NO. OF HOUSEHOLDS IN HEARTH TAX AND MEAN
HOUSEHOLD SIZE OF 4.75

PARISH	NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS	POPULATION
Cowden	75 estimated	354
Cranbrook		
Town	286	1358
Parish	474	2251
Maidstone		
Town	804	3818
Parish	1246	5918
Tonbridge		
Town	139	660
Parish	378	1796
Wrotham	461	2189

Prepared from K.A.O. Q/Rth

P. Laslett, R. Wall (eds), , Household and Family
in Past Times p.126

exploiting the enormously increased primary sources now available for study.

This leads directly to the increasing influence which historical demography has had on the study of local communities. Though essentially quantitative in approach, the work of historical demographers on population and social structure, and on the family in past times, has added a new dimension to research such as this. Authorities such as the Cambridge Group for the Study of Population and Social Structure, particularly the monumental recent works of P. Laslett and R. Wall on the family and E.A.Wrigley and R.G.Schofield on the population history of England and Wales, have had a major influence in drawing up the framework of the study and in formulating the hypotheses to be tested.

There remain a number of works on specialised matters which have some relevance to the central theme. Those which have made a direct contribution to the argument are acknowledged in the footnotes. Others, which while not drawn upon directly have contributed materially to an understanding of the problems of the aged in present and past societies, and thus helped to shape the interpretation, are included in the bibliography.

QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES TO BE EXPLORED

There are a whole range of questions about the treatment of the aged poor under the Old Poor Law which have not yet been adequately answered.

The first group is related to old age itself. Was there

an age at which paupers became eligible for regular relief, comparable to the retirement age of the twentieth century ? Many of those who now reach retirement age are far from being beyond work, suggesting that they are a long way from being biologically old. There has been no universal agreement among historians and historical demographers as to when old age began in pre-industrial England. The question appears to have been decided arbitrarily The Cambridge Group have settled on sixty years as the dividing line between middle and old age. ⁽¹⁾ Many of those who answered the questionnaires sent out by the Commissioners of 1832 said a labourer was old at fifty, ⁽²⁾ and this view has been held by others. ⁽³⁾ The sources need to be carefully examined to establish the criteria used by the parish authorities to determine eligibility for relief due to age. The relationship between poverty and the length of the working life will be explored, together with other factors which led to early ageing or affected the old in other ways. These will include such factors as malnutrition, disease, the effect of cold weather.

Further key questions concern the pension. Even the most cursory glance through a volume of overseer's accounts

-
1. Wrigley and Schofield. *op cit* p 528-529
 2. G. Oxley. Poor Relief in England and Wales 1601-1834 London 1974 p 89
 3. O.H. Hufton. The Poor of Eighteenth Century France Oxford 1979 p 111
quoting G. Lefebvre. Les Paysans du Nord p 302 who stated that old age for the French peasant began at fifty.

reveal the ubiquity of the money-dole. To avoid confusion, the term 'pension' will be reserved for the sum of money given regularly, weekly or monthly, by a parish to an old person for a minimum of a year⁽¹⁾; contributions received under the terms of a charitable foundation are not a pension in this context. Various views have been expressed as to the function of the pension. Early writers on the Poor Law believed it constituted the aged's entire means of support.⁽²⁾ Some authorities considered that its function was to bring extremely low wages up to a level on which a pensioner could survive ⁽³⁾; others that it made up the shortfall in what was the olds' principal means of support, namely charity ⁽⁴⁾. Questions as to the relationship between the pension, work and charity are thus of vital importance if a proper assessment is to be made of the treatment of the aged.

Some priority will be given to the size of the pension; how this was arrived at; how much it would buy. There is also a need to find out whether there was a relationship between the age of the individual, the degree of infirmity, the presence or absence of members of his or her family in close proximity and the size of the relief. A further hypothesis will be tested in the light of the local

-
1. The law maintained that parish vestries reassess the list of pensioners annually, removing individuals thought no longer requiring a pension. 3 W^m & M. C ii (1692); 11 W^m c 18 (1697/98)
 2. H. Fielding. A Proposal for making an effectual Provision for the Poor. London 1753 p4
 3. S. and B. Webb. op cit pl66
 4. W. K. Jordan. Social Institutions in Kent. Maidstone 1961 pp 6-8

evidence: that the true function of the pension was to provide the pensioner with the means to buy his or her own food, thus allowing some limited scope for personal preference, or the ability to spend it on other things if foodstuffs were obtained from other sources, such as a garden or as a gift; further, that the pension formed only one element in a whole range of relief measures provided by the parish, and not always the most important.

This leads on naturally to the need to elucidate the other components available to the aged in the network of relief measures developed by the parishes. Questions will be addressed to the sources concerning relief in kind; what it consisted of, the standard of living it made possible, including the nutritional standard; the treatment of the old during sickness and especially during the last illness. Finally, a group of important questions relating to the workhouse need answers if their real role in the lives of aged paupers is to be properly understood.

The attention has so far been concentrated on the network of supportive services which were provided by the parish alone. They can be regarded as minimal provision. To make for a more comprehensive study of the treatment of the old, it is essential to extend the examination to include other agencies working alongside the parish. In the first place, how far were the aged able to contribute to their own maintenance by paid work for the parish or for private individuals? How far was self-help a factor in survival? Did they still have a role to play in the community? What role

was played by their children or other members of their families in their support? Lastly, some effort will be made to estimate the part played by charity on their lives, either as charitable foundations, providing rent free almshouses or annual income for distribution in cash or in kind, as for example bread or clothing. Indiscriminate giving also has a place; but though begging continued throughout the whole period, and was often condoned by the authorities, it was forbidden by law and will not be discussed. Nevertheless it should not be forgotten that begging could make a big difference to those aged who indulged in the practice.

As far as the sources will allow, the question of changing attitudes to the poor and old will be assessed. This has particular relevance to the period after 1723 with the introduction of the workhouse. What happened to their treatment over such a long period? Can the sources provide any answers about the relationship between destitution, old age, changing social and economic conditions, given the fact that having reached what their contemporaries termed old, whatever treatment they received their lives would only be prolonged or shortened by a year or two at most.

None of the questions and hypotheses so far formulated are directed towards reaching conclusions about the numbers of the aged who ended their days 'on the Parish'. Given the limitations of the sources, and the fact that the sources themselves were not prepared with statistical enquiries in mind, any quantitative statements made about the aged are

little more than rough estimates. That is no reason for not attempting the task. Before this could be done in the present instance, it was necessary to resolve some technical problems related to providing reliable evidence about the age of the individuals believed to be aged poor. The various tests undertaken to reach some estimate of the numbers of poor, that is the proportion of the population who ended their days as parish pensioners, will be discussed as a separate section, entitled 'How Many Old Pensioners?' towards the end of this chapter.

APPROACH TO THE SOURCES

The details relating to the relief of the aged pensioners in any parish are to be found scattered among the entries in the overseers' accounts about possibly more than a hundred people who were receiving relief in any one year; and among those of several years if the individual was a pensioner for some time. Some widows, like Sarah Pinson of Tonbridge, Elizabeth Sharp of Cranbrook and Ellin Sands, a mentally defective from Cowden, were in receipt of relief for thirty-nine, twenty-two and seventy-two years respectively.⁽¹⁾ Their histories straddle several volumes of accounts. This information required to be rendered into a more useful form before it could be of any value.

Primary attention had to be directed towards making sure that any information used as evidence did in fact refer only to the old. Who, therefore, among the many

1. K.A.O. P 371/12/2-5. P 100/12/1-3. P 99/12/1-2

hundreds who received poor relief over the years was truly old? Some were easily recognised since they were called old, and the overseers should at least be given credit for recognising old age when they saw it. References such as Old Widow Medhurst, Old Wilmshurst, or Old Tom were strongly presumptive of old age. Others were described in such a way as to make the assumption of old age more than a reasonable proposition. There were, for example, many entries such as John Hollamby, worn out; Robert Woodman and wife, both very infirm; or Widow Eastland, being in years. ⁽¹⁾

To reduce the information to a more coherent form, all the entries relating to such individuals were abstracted from the accounts and arranged chronologically to form biographies or case histories covering their years of receiving relief. The early years of such histories showed them to be, in many instances, only receiving assistance from time to time, and becoming pensioners later. A clear pattern of relief emerged which could then be extended to unidentifiable pensioners, on the grounds that any pauper who received the same treatment was also old. This deduction would, however, have to be qualified, since parishes also supported those younger members of the community who might be sick or handicapped. These were eliminated later by reference to the parish registers. Fifteen hundred case histories were built up in this way, covering the years

1. K.A.O. P 371/12/5.

1660 -1795, later reduced to eleven hundred and twenty-three. These provided the core of the evidence to which questions about the treatment of the aged will be addressed. It is not possible to claim that these case histories, of varying length of pension lives are wholly comprehensive, giving every detail of all the items given, and all the services rendered to the old over the time span which the study covers, but they are sufficient to enable broad based discussion to proceed. A sample of such case histories, derived from all the parishes is included as Appendix I.

So far, old age has been presumed, based on the recognition by contemporaries of a biological condition, from external appearance and ability to function. It follows from this that it was necessary to pose the question, How old is old?, to determine the relationship between biological old age and chronological old age since the two are not the same. Individual overseers adopted differing standards, and a pensioner has been called old in the accounts whereas the parish registers show the true age to be under sixty. For example, two female pensioners died in Wrotham parish in 1730, - Old Eliza Jarrett and Widow Mary James. It is logical to assume that the former was the older, yet reference to the parish registers show that Eliza Jarrett was a spinster aged fifty-six, while Mary James was well over seventy, and was never once referred to as old.⁽¹⁾

1. K.A.O. P 406/12/4.

Wrotham Parish Register Transcripts. K.A.O. TR 1303/05.

This is an isolated example but a systematic approach to the parish registers of all five parishes was essential to clarify the position.

Historical demographers working on family reconstitution have shown that only a small proportion of individuals who settled and subsequently died in a parish were also born there.⁽¹⁾ Out of the 260 presumed old abstracted from the Cranbrook overseers' accounts, only 64 or 24.6% were born there. For Tonbridge, Cowden and Wrotham, the percentage of native born were 36.7%, 37.0% and 33.5% respectively. The situation in Maidstone requires some qualification. The original count of potential old came to well over a thousand, Maidstone being by far the most populated parish. Time alone ruled out the possibility of detailing all their relief for the purposes of case histories, or of searching out an age for them all. As a compromise, for the final analysis only those pensioners actually called old, or by some other appellation which made the fact of old age indisputable, were included. This gave a final total of 373. Even of these, only 33.7% were found in the baptismal register.⁽²⁾ This posed a problem. Some means of establishing an approximate age, fairly close to the real age, needed to be found if any statements made about the

1. M. Flinn. The European Demographic System. London 1981.
p124

2. Parish Register Transcripts. Cowden P 99/28/4
K.A.O. Cranbrook TR 495/2-4
Tonbridge TR 2451/1-2
Wrotham TR 1303-5

Original Registers for Maidstone housed at All Saints
Parish Church

treatment of the aged in West Kent were to be firmly based and generally acceptable.

The full details of how this problem was resolved forms the substance of Appendix A.1, but this short account is included here by way of introduction. Since the burial dates of all the aged pensioners were known either from the burial registers or from the overseers' accounts, these constituted a fixed point in time. Two assumptions were made: that the vast majority of those marrying in the parishes would conform to the national pattern, which has established that the mean age of first marriage over three centuries has been around twenty-five for women and two or three years older for men. (1)

Many of the pensioners had been married in the chosen parishes. If the assumption is made that the woman was twenty-five and the man twenty-seven, by a simple calculation from the date of marriage to the date of burial an approximate age at death can be projected.

Some couples who ended their lives as parish paupers were neither born nor married there, but their children were baptised there. The second assumption made was that the couple settled in the parish shortly after marriage and the first child was born a year later, giving the mother an age of around twenty-six and the father twenty-eight. It is accepted that people marry both younger and older than the mean, and that the first date of baptism discovered of a

1. Wrigley and Schofield. op cit p261

child of that marriage may not be the first born. Some independent confirmation must be provided to ensure that the technique gave results sufficiently close to the real ages to be acceptable. The sampling, the hypotheses tested, the results and the confirmation are all laid out in detail in Appendix A.1.

With the resolution of these technical problems it was now possible to categorise the aged into three groups:

1. Those who had an entry in a baptismal register
2. Those called old but for whom no confirmation of age was to be found in the registers.

3. Those for whom a presumed age had been calculated on the basis of the hypothesis testing outlined above.

These latter might in reality be several years older or younger than the age given but except in a few cases, the two ages would be close enough to make the presumption of old age certain.

The information gathered in this way is arranged statistically overleaf. Table 1.3 shows that of the 1500 pensioners originally isolated, an age has been allocated to 1131, leaving 369 for whom no information of any kind could be found. These were excluded from any subsequent analysis, leaving a body of pensioners about whom few doubts remain that they are old, both biologically and chronologically.

HOW MANY OLD PENSIONERS?

From five parishes in West Kent, just over eleven hundred aged have emerged, about whom statements can be made with certainty. These were by no means all the old paupers

Table 1.3

PENSIONERS AND OLD AGE

PARTISH	TOTAL OF PENSIONERS	"AGED" FROM BAPTISMAL REGISTERS	CALLED OLD	AGED BY CALCULATION	PERCENTAGE VERIFIED AS OLD
Cowden	100	37 (37.0%)	12 (12.0%)	28 (28.0)	77.0%
Cranbrook	260	64 (24.6%)	33 (12.7%)	100 (38.4%)	75.7%
Maidstone	373 *	126 (33.7%)	76 (20.3%)	171 (45.8%)	99.8%
Tonbridge	204	75 (31.4%)	52 (25.5%)	72 (35.3%)	92.2%
Wrotham	194	65 (33.5%)	22 (11.3%)	63 (32.5%)	77.3%
TOTAL	1131	367	195	434	

* all called "old"

Sources: Registers of Baptism
Overseers Accounts
By calculation (see Appendix II)

who passed through the hands of the parish officers during the course of a hundred and fifty years. Three hundred and sixty-nine of the original number discovered were discarded from the discussion because of insufficient information about their ages but it is almost certain that most of them would have been old. To these must be added seven hundred Maidstone pensioners, left out because they were not called old. Again many would qualify. Some aged do not appear in the overseers' accounts because they were being maintained by local charities. Some are lost for ever because of defective accounts. How many aged pensioners are irretrievably lost, for example, in the missing accounts in Tonbridge from 1714 to 1728?⁽¹⁾ or in Maidstone after 1782, when Vestry government was disbanded and no more detailed accounts were kept.⁽²⁾ Or after 1760 when Cranbrook, except in a few cases, listed all pensions as 'weekly pays'⁽³⁾ and the majority of the old are subsumed in this single entry. After 1723, when workhouses became established in all five parishes, many of the old, in particular old men, recently widowed, or not in good health, were admitted directly to the workhouse without ever having received relief or a pension, and can no longer be recovered.

The notoriety which has clung to the Old Poor Law down the years has left the historical myth of vast hordes of shiftless individuals spending years being

1. K.A.O. P 371/12/2-3
2. K.A.O. P 241/11/10-11
3. K.A.O. P 100/12/5-7

supported by their fellow parishioners. This is readily disproved in the case of the old, the total of the unquestioned aged recovered from the sources in this instance gives an average of two new pensioners in each parish annually over the entire period. Reference to overseers accounts for most parishes produces a slightly higher average of about 3 - 5. Given the high infant mortality at the time and the steady toll of life thereafter, only six to ten percent of the population reached the aged of sixty. ⁽¹⁾ It is a reasonable hypothesis that even had all the aged paupers in these five parishes been recovered, the proportion of the whole population would have been small.

Some tests have been devised to provide support for or against the proposition. Because of the nature of the evidence the tests are imprecise but they would appear to be adequate for the purpose.

Test I

Starting with the Hearth Tax of 1664 ⁽²⁾, an attempt was made to correlate the names of the non chargeable householders in the parishes with the names of their pensioners in subsequent years, since it is reasonable to expect that most of the very poor would be non chargeable and many likely to end up as parish paupers. The overseers' accounts were followed through for a period of fifty years⁽³⁾, on the assumption that even if a householder was

1. Wrigley and Schofield. op cit pp528-529

2. K.A.O. Q/RTh.

3. K.A.O. P 99/12/1; P 100/12/1-2; P 241/11/1-4; P371/12/1-2
P 406/12/1-2

as young as twenty-five in 1664, he would be seventy-five by 1714 and would be, or had been, a pensioner if he was going to be one. Widows of householders were also searched out, since they frequently outlived their spouses. The results of this test are laid out in the table overleaf, referred to as Test I. They are very suggestive of small numbers becoming pensioners, but not conclusive since much could have happened in the intervening half century. Some would have died, some migrated elsewhere or been removed by the parish. The small numbers ending up on the parish hide an important fact; that many had lost considerable status during their lifetimes. Some who eventually became paupers had, in 1664, paid the tax on one, two or even three hearths.⁽¹⁾ The analysis also suggests that in the parishes with a sizeable urban settlement, the poor were less mobile and more likely to become pensioners. It is difficult to pin-point reasons. Casual work might have been easier to get. Kinship support networks might have been better developed than in rural areas. They might even have found it advisable to remain where they were in order to safeguard their settlement. There is some evidence that even the poorest of families were well aware of the importance to them of any scrap of paper giving them a claim on a parish. Settlement certificates, a ten pound lease or evidence of having served a parish office were treasured for years.⁽²⁾

1. K.A.O. Q/Rth.

2. W.E. Tate. The Parish Chest. Cambridge (rev. ed.) 1969
p203

Table 1.4 TO DETERMINE NO. OF NON-CHARGEABLE HOUSEHOLDERS
OR WIDOWS WHO BECOME PENSIONERS

PARISH	NUMBER IN CASE HISTORIES TO 1714	NUMBER OF NON-CHARG'LE HEARTH TAX	PERCENTAGE LIKELY TO BECOME PENSIONERS
Cowden	23	6	26.0
Cranbrook	171	100	58.0
Maidstone	210	108 *	51.0
Tonbridge	80	38	48.0
Wrotham	43	18	40.0

* Note: The Maidstone numbers refer only to those called "old" by the overseers. True figure could approach that of Cranbrook.

Sources K.A.O. Q/RTh Hearth Tax (Kent 1664)
Overseers K.A.O. P99/12/1-2
Accounts K.A.O. P100/12/1-2
 K.A.O. P241/11/1-2
 K.A.O. P371/12/1-2
 K.A.O. P406/12/2-5

Test II.

The Hearth Tax Returns have also been widely used to project population estimates for the year of the tax. This facility provided the basis for a further testing of the hypothesis. The population is usually worked out by counting the total number of houses listed for the particular town or parish and multiplying this by a second number representing the mean household size. The population arrived at will naturally depend on the multiplier used, and this has changed over time according to the demographer. In this instance 4.75 has been used, as being the mean household size arrived at by the most recent calculations, using the most sophisticated techniques. ⁽¹⁾ To test the hypothesis, the numbers of pensioners listed for the year 1664, or for the year nearest that date available from parish accounts, were expressed as a percentage of the total estimated population for each parish. These results are expressed in tabular form in Table 1.5.

Some qualifying remarks are essential to underline the fragility of the evidence with which this analysis had to be carried out. There are no separate households for Cowden in the Hearth Tax; the parish was included within the Hundred of Somerden. ⁽²⁾ The number of households given in the previous table results from close examination of parish boundaries, names of occupiers and their correlation with

1. P. Laslett. Mean Household Size in England since the Sixteenth Century in Laslett and R. Wall (eds) Household and Family in Past Time. London 1975. p126.

2. K.A.O. Q/RTh

Table 1.5 TABLE SHOWING PERCENTAGE OF PARISH
PENSIONERS IN POPULATION c.1664

PARISH	POPULATION 1664	NO. OF PENSIONERS	% OF POPULATION
Cowden	354	4 (1665)	1.1
Cranbrook (Town)	1358	18 (1673)	1.3
Maidstone (Town)	3818	27 (1666)	0.7
Tonbridge (Parish)	1796	9 (1670)	0.5
Wrotham	1844	7 (1664)	0.3

Source: K.A.O. Q/RTh
Overseers Accounts

parish documents. Secondly, because of missing pages the first list of pensioners for Cranbrook is seven years late.⁽¹⁾ It must be taken for granted that the parish could not and did not change the numbers of pensioners much from year to year because of its poverty.

Test III.

The hypothesis, that the number of aged poor would always be small, can also be tested for the end of the period by using the population counts made during the 1801 census in the same way as the Hearth Tax was used.⁽²⁾ This time in addition to listing the pensioners, an allowance has to be made for pensioners who were in the workhouse. Contrary to popular belief, the workhouses in 1801 were not filled with the aged. It is known, for example, that out of 60 inmates in the Tonbridge workhouse in 1801, only seven were over 60.⁽³⁾ This is less than a quarter of the out-pensioners in 1801.⁽⁴⁾ In Cowden workhouse there were four aged out of a total of thirteen.⁽⁵⁾ The result obtained by comparing the number of out-pensioners and aged workhouse inmates with the populations of 1801 is again a small percentage. Even if the numbers were doubled by allowing a hundred percent rise for workhouse inmates, there would be a dramatic rise in the number of aged but a negligible quota of the population. The data relating to this test using the

1.K.A.O. P 100/12/1

2.(V)ictoria (C)ounty (H)istory of Kent Vol III. London 1908
pp 362-363

3.K.A.O. P 371/12/34 List of Inmates (1800-1804)

4.K.A.O. P 371/12/6

5.K.A.O. P 99/12/2

Table 1.6 PERCENTAGE OUT-PENSIONERS IN
POPULATION IN 1801

PARISH	POPULATION 1801	NO. OF PENSIONERS	% OF POPULATION
Cowden	550	12	2.0
Cranbrook (Town)	2561	Figures	unavailable
Maidstone (Town)	5575	68	1.2
Tonbridge	4371	34	0.8
Wrotham	1989	36	1.8

Source: Census Returns 1801. Victoria County
History of Kent. Vol III p358
Overseers Accounts

1801 census are tabulated in Table 1.6.

Some separate tests on the hypothesis were performed for Maidstone since there are available population counts made by the incumbents for odd years between 1664 and 1801. These counts were made in 1670, when the population had dropped to 3000, a measure of the effect of three years of plague; in 1695, numbers had climbed back to 3676. Using all Maidstone's pensioners in the calculation, and not simply those called old, it is found that the ratio of pensioners to population in 1670 was 0.73% and that for 1695, 1.50%. This latter figure is double that of the 1664 and 1670 comparisons. It can be accounted for if the assumption is made that the 1690's, being a decade of exceptionally poor harvests, dearth and widespread hunger among the poor, had exceptionally large numbers on relief. It nevertheless is always a small proportion of the general population.⁽¹⁾ A population count was also made in Maidstone in 1781, by the Rev. John Denne as preparatory work for the demographic survey of the town carried out by the Rev. John Howlett.⁽²⁾ Denne made the population 5,775 which included both rural and urban parts of the parish; Howlett separated the two, working on numbers of 5,028 and 667. Howlett also included in his calculations the women and children of 500 soldiers then quartered in the town, as well as transient lodgers.

1. D.G.Coleman. The Economy of Kent under the Later Stuarts. Unpub. Ph.D. Thesis. London 1951. Table 56 p.304

2. J. Howlett. Observations on the Increased population, Healthiness, etc. of the town of Maidstone. Maidstone 1782 p3. J.Denne. Vicar Census 1871 (Howlett p3)

This may distort his analysis somewhat. At the very least the population is higher than that of 1801. The number of out-pensioners in 1782 was between 60 and 70; workhouse capacity at this time was about 160, usually no more than a third being aged. This gives an additional 53 making about 120 aged on the parish. this gives a percentage of 3.0% somewhat higher than the usual result, but still continues to give support to the hypothesis. Howlett's social structure gives 5.0% of the population as over 70.⁽¹⁾

Taken together, the results of this testing, though possibly somewhat unscientific, go a long way towards showing that despite great poverty, the vast majority of the aged poor managed to keep themselves independent of the Old Poor Law. Doubts may thus be raised about the value and significance of a dissertation which subjects to detailed study such a tiny minority. In justification, it may be said that it is, however, concerned only with five parishes in a circumscribed area of Kent, and all those about whom any doubt existed have been excluded. If such a count were to be extended to all 397 Kentish parishes, and thereafter to all counties nationally, a sizeable group would emerge, about whom little or nothing is known of how society treated them in their last years. The poverty of old age may have been much higher in other regions than it was in West Kent, but until the matter is examined systematically, no one will ever know. This study prepares the way for others to take

1. J. Howlett. op cit pp 20-21

up the search, in different counties for a similar chronological period.

This first chapter has defined the limits of the study, both geographically and temporally. Certain technical problems relating to identification of the aged in the sources, their true ages and about their actual numbers, have been raised, while the very scattered evidence to be found in the occasionally defective sources has been reduced to a more useful format to which questions about their treatment can be addressed and hypotheses tested.

Before proceeding to the core of the thesis, a short Chapter II will place the aged into their communities; an overview discussing the social and economic situation both in the parishes and in West Kent. There will also be some discussion of the Old Por Law as it was administered locally, but confined to those aspects directly affecting the aged.

Chapters III to V constitute the core of the thesis.

The physical environment will receive detailed attention in Chapter III, including relief in kind, housing and the standard of living, the role of almshouses; since old age is invariably accompanied by frailty, sickness and ultimately death, the treatment in such situations will be included in the discussion. Since variety according to need characterised the treatment, this chapter will, therefore, range over a number of issues.

Historically it is the pension which has made the

biggest impact. This form of relief will be considered in depth in Chapter IV. Within the limits of the sources the sizes of pensions awarded in the various parishes will be subjected to quantitative analysis, to establish the presence or otherwise of standard pensions. If not, attempts will be made to determine the guidelines used by the parish officers in deciding the level of the money doles distributed. Other important issues concern the ages at which pensions were first received, the length of pension lives, and any sex differences which may be observed.

Since the ability to do paid work was not only related to the size of the pension but to possible improvement in the standard of living, 'setting on work' will be considered in this chapter as will any efforts made by the aged to support themselves, and thus to improve their condition. Some time will be expended in attempting to relate the size of the pension to prices; to poor harvests and consequent high prices, to malnutrition and subsequent liability to infection.

Chapter V will deal exclusively with the role of the general workhouse in the treatment of the old.

In Chapter VI the discussion moves slightly away from the direct benefits conferred under the provisions of the Old Poor Law, to consider links with other supportive agencies. The role of the family and that of charitable foundations, as well as indiscriminate charity, together with some assessment of their effectiveness, will receive high priority.

The final chapter will draw the findings together and formulate conclusions. The research has evolved a new way of exploiting old sources. It may, therefore, offer a new set of principles for future exploration of these same sources elsewhere in the country.

CHAPTER TWO - THE OLD IN THE COMMUNITY

The Social and Economic Environment: Poor Law Practices with respect to the old.

Since the poor of the five selected parishes have now been identified, given ages wherever possible, the numbers ascertained, and the length of their pension lives calculated, it is now perfectly possible to proceed to attempt to find answers to the questions raised and the hypotheses posed in the first chapter. The resulting discussions are likely to be sterile unless placed in proper context. The old were part of a community, and their treatment under the Old Poor Law was not simply part of a two way relationship between paupers and overseers. The social and economic state of the parish, whether it was rich or poor, with work to offer or not, had a large population or a small one, efficient parish officers or otherwise, all in their own way influenced the standard of living and comfort of the old pensioner. Concentrating the attention on overseers accounts alone often leads to the belief that a hard-nosed attitude pervaded the whole of the Old Poor Law, whereas quite often the overseers and the Vestry between them were doing the best they could under difficult circumstances.

The overseers of Cranbrook parish give the appearance of being mean and stingy, giving tiny pensions and crowding three or four pensioners into one cottage while others around stood empty. Cranbrook, however, had no charities of bread or money, no almshouses, and only half the

parishioners paid rent and rates because of their poverty. There was no work. If this is coupled with the perpetual shortage of copper coin which pervaded the realm, the parish may be seen rather as having difficulty in doing as much as it did.⁽¹⁾

A start will be made by placing the aged into their geographic and economic contexts, beginning with the parishes as they were in the 1660's, and continuing through the eighteenth century to the end of the period. The custom of regarding the non-chargeable households of the Hearth Tax Returns as living at or below an acceptable 'poverty line', for the time, will be followed to give a rough measure of the extent of poverty in the parishes.⁽²⁾

Cowden was a remote, sparsely populated parish in the extreme south western corner of the Weald. It covered 3,260 acres,⁽³⁾ mainly pasture since the wet heavy clay made ploughing difficult.⁽⁴⁾ The main agricultural occupations were mixed farming, cattle and horse breeding and some sheep fattening. Cloth manufacture and iron working had been of some importance but were now beginning to decline, employing only a few.⁽⁵⁾ The population has been estimated from the Hearth Tax of 1664 as being around 354 with 26.40 per cent being non-chargeable.⁽⁶⁾ Since the average of non-chargeable

1. K.A.O. P 100/12/1-6

2. Coleman. op cit p.81

3. V.C.H. Vol. III p 368

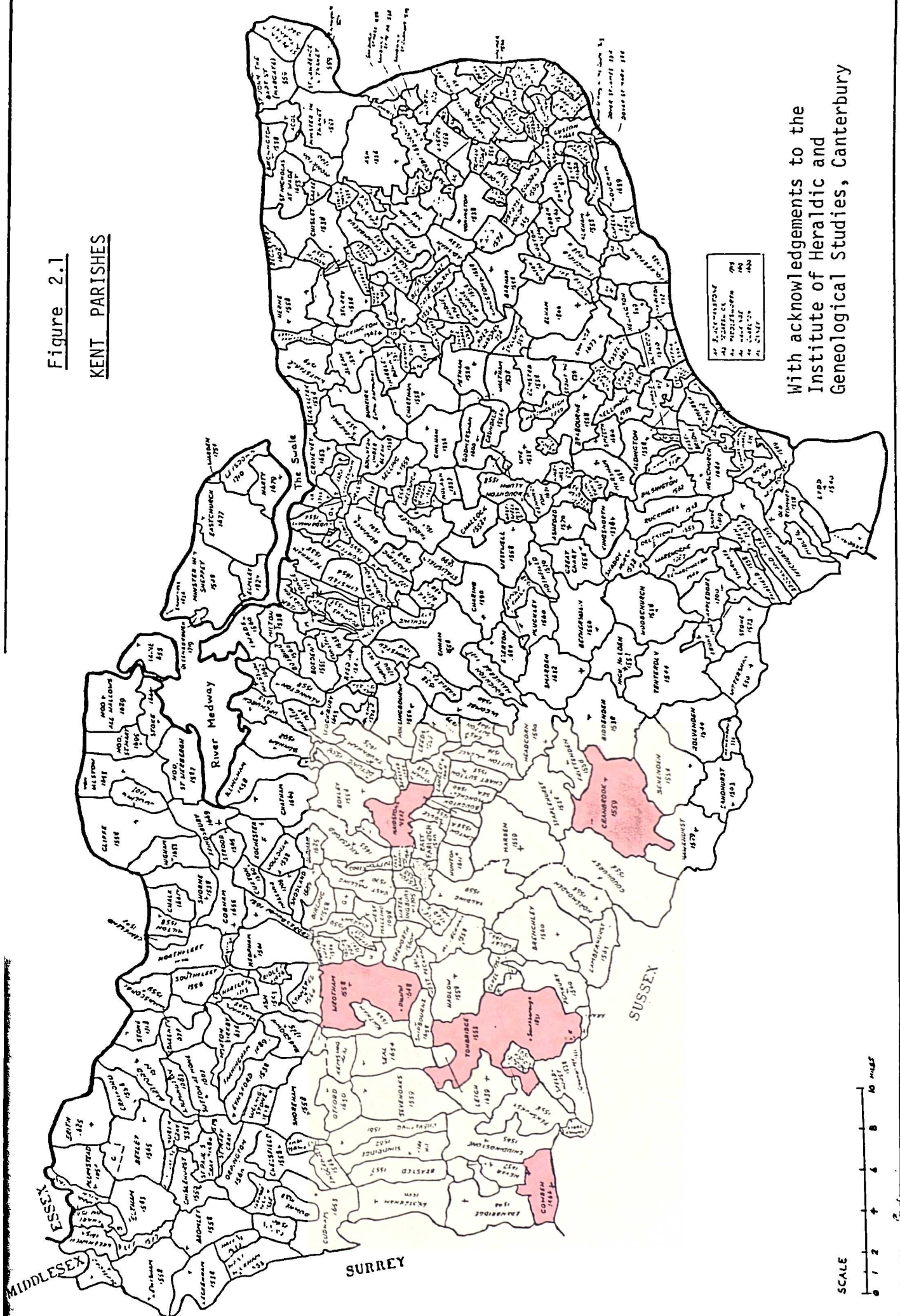
4. G. Ewing. Records of a Wealden Parish, Cowden. Tunbridge Wells 1926 pp 86-87

5. Ibid. p 88

6. K.A.O. Q/RTh.

Figure 2.1

KENT PARISHES



households for Kent as a whole has been calculated to be about 30.00 per cent⁽¹⁾, Cowden was one of the more prosperous parishes, the numbers of aged were small and the relatively high figure of 1.10 per cent becoming parish pensioners suggests a liberal community. The eight almshouses were more than sufficient for the needs of the old.⁽²⁾

The eighteenth century saw little change in this socio-economic background, iron working continued fitfully, dwindling gradually to disappear by 1770.⁽³⁾ Cloth making continued to the end of the century on a very small scale, a tiny specialised glove making industry keeping a few women in employment.⁽⁴⁾

The population remained stagnant. the century and a half from the 1644 Hearth Tax to the 1801 Census saw a rise of just over 200 in actual numbers⁽⁵⁾, probably representing just about the increase that could be sustained by agriculture alone. A rise to 2.0 per cent of the population becoming parish pensioners is also indicative of decreased occupational opportunities for the old, and possibly rising numbers.⁽⁶⁾

Cranbrook, with the adjoining parishes of Goudhurst and Tenterden, had been the centre of the broadcloth

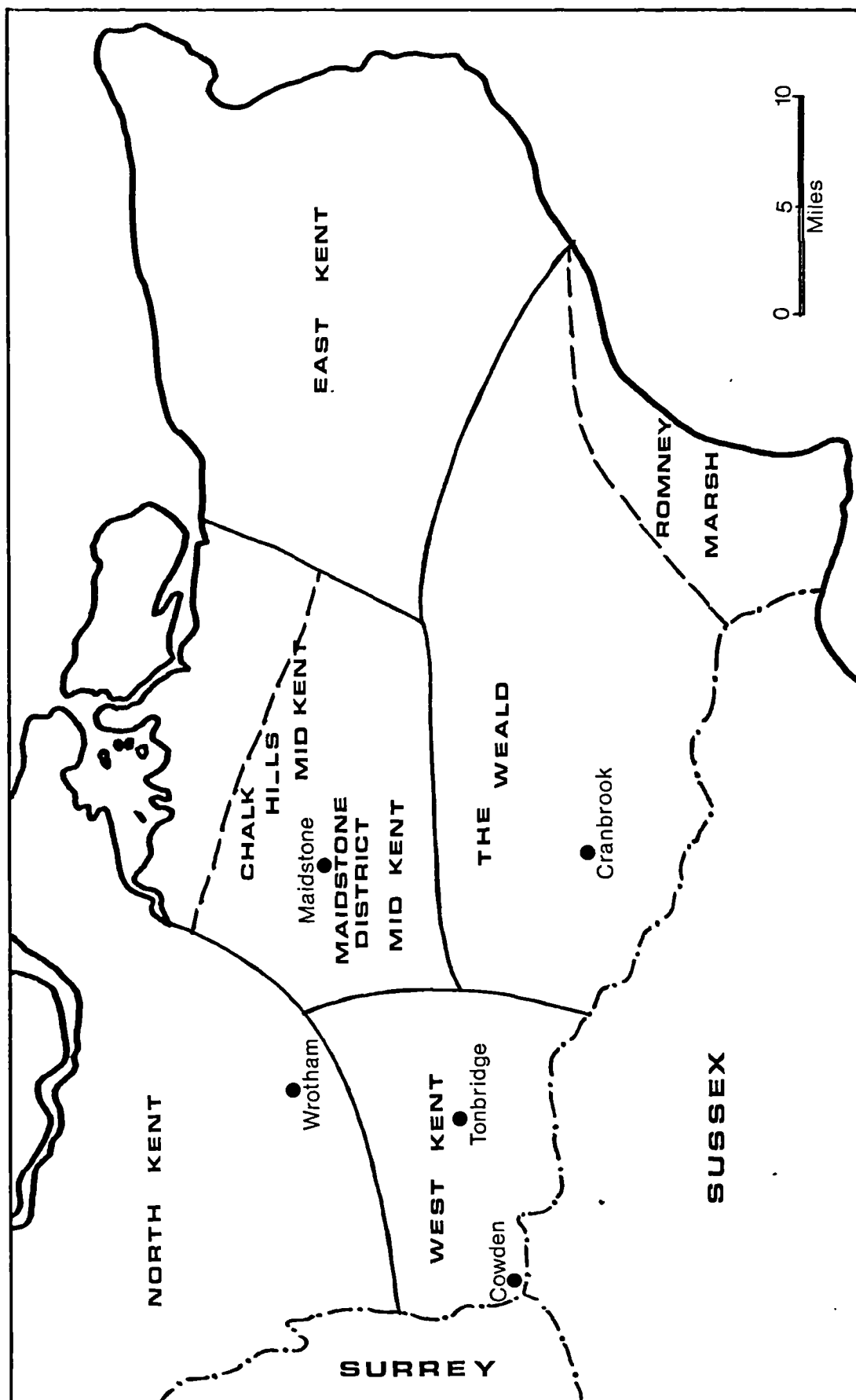
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1. A. Everitt, 'Farm Labourers' in J. Thirsk (ed) Agrarian History of England and Wales. Vol IV. Cambridge 1965 pp 116-119
 2. K.A.O. P 99/12/1; Ewing. op cit p. 28
 3. Ewing. Cowden p 88
 4. Ibid. p 90
 5. V.C.H. Vol III. p 362
 6. See Table 1.6, Chapter One

industry which had reached its peak by 1580.⁽¹⁾ At the time of the Restoration decline was on the way with serious effects on local employment. An extensive parish of just over 10,000 acres, the principal settlement was Cranbrook town with a population of about 1350. Smaller settlements, Sissinghurst, Golford, Hartley and Glassenbury, accounted for perhaps another 1000 for the rural part.⁽²⁾ These numbers represent a declining population. That of Cranbrook town itself was probably as high as 3000 in 1580⁽³⁾. With increased foreign competition, changing fashion and restrictive legislation curtailing their work opportunities, thousands of skilled cloth workers migrated to other areas both at home and on the continent to set up on their own.⁽⁴⁾ They left behind thousands of unskilled labourers, including many women for whom work would always be difficult to find. Cattle breeding, arable farming, timber production, hop and fruit culture expanded only slowly to absorb the surplus labour.⁽⁵⁾ The poverty of the parish comes out clearly in the Hearth Tax with non-chargeable households in Cranbrook town reaching 60.00 per cent, and 40.00 per cent for the parish as a whole.⁽⁶⁾

For most of the period under review, Cranbrook was a parish in recession, its income from the poor rates severely reduced by the large number of empty shops

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1. F. Jessup. A History of Kent. Chichester 1974 p 86
 2. K.A.O. Q/RTh
 3. Jessup. op cit p 86
 4. C.W.Chalklin. Seventeenth Century Kent. London 1965 pp 120-122; Coleman thesis, p 153
 5. Coleman thesis, p 153
 6. K.A.O. Q/RTh.

Figure 2.2 KENT AGRICULTURAL REGIONS
 (after William Marshall c. 1798)



and dwellings, and by the inability of many of the poorest to pay either rents or rates.⁽¹⁾ The absence of almshouses forced the parish to house the aged poor in rentable accommodation, thus increasing the pressure on income. Cranbrook was perpetually faced with two apparently insoluble difficulties, a drastically reduced income and a greatly increased demand for poor relief. Any initiatives relating to the care of the aged would thus always be restricted by lack of resources.

Cranbrook, with the exception of Maidstone, had the largest population of all five parishes. In 1700 the overseers disbursed £350 in poor relief and supported 19 pensioners.⁽²⁾ Tonbridge parish in the same year disbursed £580 and supported 29 pensioners.⁽³⁾ Cowden with its minute population expended £140 and supported 4 aged.⁽⁴⁾ These sums amount to eight shillings per head of the population annually for Cowden, five for Tonbridge but only three for Cranbrook.

Prosperity returned only slowly to the parish. Damask weaving and hop-bagging slowly replaced the cloth industry. Utilisation of the extensive woodland to supply increasing demands for timber, and arable farming employed many, while intensive parish farming of over a thousand acres on a commercial basis, utilising pauper labour, helped to reduce the poor rate by half and tradesmen were slowly induced to

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1. K.A.O. P 100/12/1-6 (Rating Lists)
 2. K.A.O. P 100/12/2
 3. K.A.O. P 371/12/2
 4. K.A.O. P 99/12/1

return.⁽¹⁾ The population slowly rose during the century, that of the town reaching 2,561 by 1801.⁽²⁾

Maidstone was the most urban of the five parishes, situated on the banks of the Medway at the intersection of the east-west London to Dover road, and the north-south route from the north Kent coast through Tonbridge to the Sussex coast. The parish covered 4,500 acres⁽³⁾, the population of 3818 was for the most part crowded into the narrow streets of the town, while a hundred or two dwelt in the rural perimeter.⁽⁴⁾

An important regional market for the agricultural products of the Weald, its stature was being enhanced by growing river traffic with Rochester and hence with London. Several weekly passenger sailings to and from the capital made it the most easily accessible town in Kent, with marked effects on its size and prosperity. A diversity of trades and manufactures, thread twisting, linen dressing, flax growing, brewing, mining of fullers earth and Kentish rag, a building stone much sought after, and the growing hop culture attracted a host of permanent and temporary settlers.⁽⁵⁾

Despite this obvious commercial prosperity, a total of 49.70 per cent of non-chargeable households in the town and 37.50 per cent for the parish as a whole indicates a high

1. R. Farley. History of the Weald of Kent. Vol II. Part II
Ashford 1871. pp 468-469

2. V.C.H. III p 363

3. Ibid. p 370

4. K.A.O. Q/RTh.

5. Farley. op cit Vol II. Part II p 286

level of poverty.⁽¹⁾ Two outbreaks of plague in 1665 and 1668⁽²⁾, and a high level of 'sickness' among the population⁽³⁾ caused a drop to 3,676 by 1676.⁽⁴⁾ 'Sickness' would appear to have been a constant feature among the aged.⁽⁵⁾

Throughout the eighteenth century Maidstone's easy access enhanced its commercial prosperity. Until 1742, when the Medway was canalised as far as Tonbridge, it remained the upper limit of tidal waters. Development of administrative facilities also took place at the expense of Canterbury. In consequence Maidstone became the fastest growing town in Kent, the population reaching 5,739 in 1782⁽⁶⁾ and 8,027 in 1801.⁽⁷⁾

The busy town provided a variety of opportunities for casual labour for young and old. The aged helped on market days, in the market itself, in the numerous inns at the quaysides and on the hoys. They also formed part of the large band of occasional day workers needed during the busy agricultural seasons; planting, hoeing, harvesting, while there was always work for the skilled craftsman.⁽⁸⁾ This enormous diversity of casual work led to an early

1. K.A.O. Q/RTh.

2. Burial Registers. All Saints Church, Maidstone

3. K.A.O. P 241/11/1-3

4. Coleman thesis. p 309. Quoting incumbents count

5. K.A.O. P241/11/1-3

6. Census of John Denne, Vicar, 1782. Coleman thesis p 309

7. V.C.H. Vol III. p 370

8. S.C.Lamprey. History and Descriptive Account of Maidstone. Maidstone 1834. p 42

Wm. Marshall. The Rural Economy of the Southern Counties. London. 1798 p 240

abandonment of 'setting on work' by the parish, except for those domestic occupations such as lodging, washing, nursing and attendance.⁽¹⁾

Tonbridge parish was the largest in Kent, covering 15,000 acres.⁽²⁾ It was a long, narrow parish aligned from north-north-west to south-south east. The only settlement of any size in the 1660's was Tonbridge town itself, situated at the northern end of the seven mile long parish, on the crossing of the Medway by the London to Rye road. Pensioners could thus live up to five miles from the administrative facilities, but the division of the parish into four districts, each with its own overseer, and limited freedom of decision making, made access to and treatment of the aged easier.⁽³⁾

The population of the parish in 1664 was about 1,800 and that of the town between 600 and 700.⁽⁴⁾ With non-chargeable households for the town reaching 51.00 per cent, and 38.30 for the parish, the underlying poverty is again high.⁽⁵⁾ As in many other Wealden parishes cloth making and iron working were former important industries, but now in decline, and not yet replaced by hops and fruit.⁽⁶⁾

At the south-eastern tip, a new settlement was beginning to grow. This was Tunbridge Wells, slowly

1. K.A.O. P 241/11/1-14
2. V.C.H. Vol III. p 388
3. K.A.O. P 371/12/1-6
4. K.A.O. Q/RTh.
5. Ibid.
6. Chalkin. Op cit. p 92

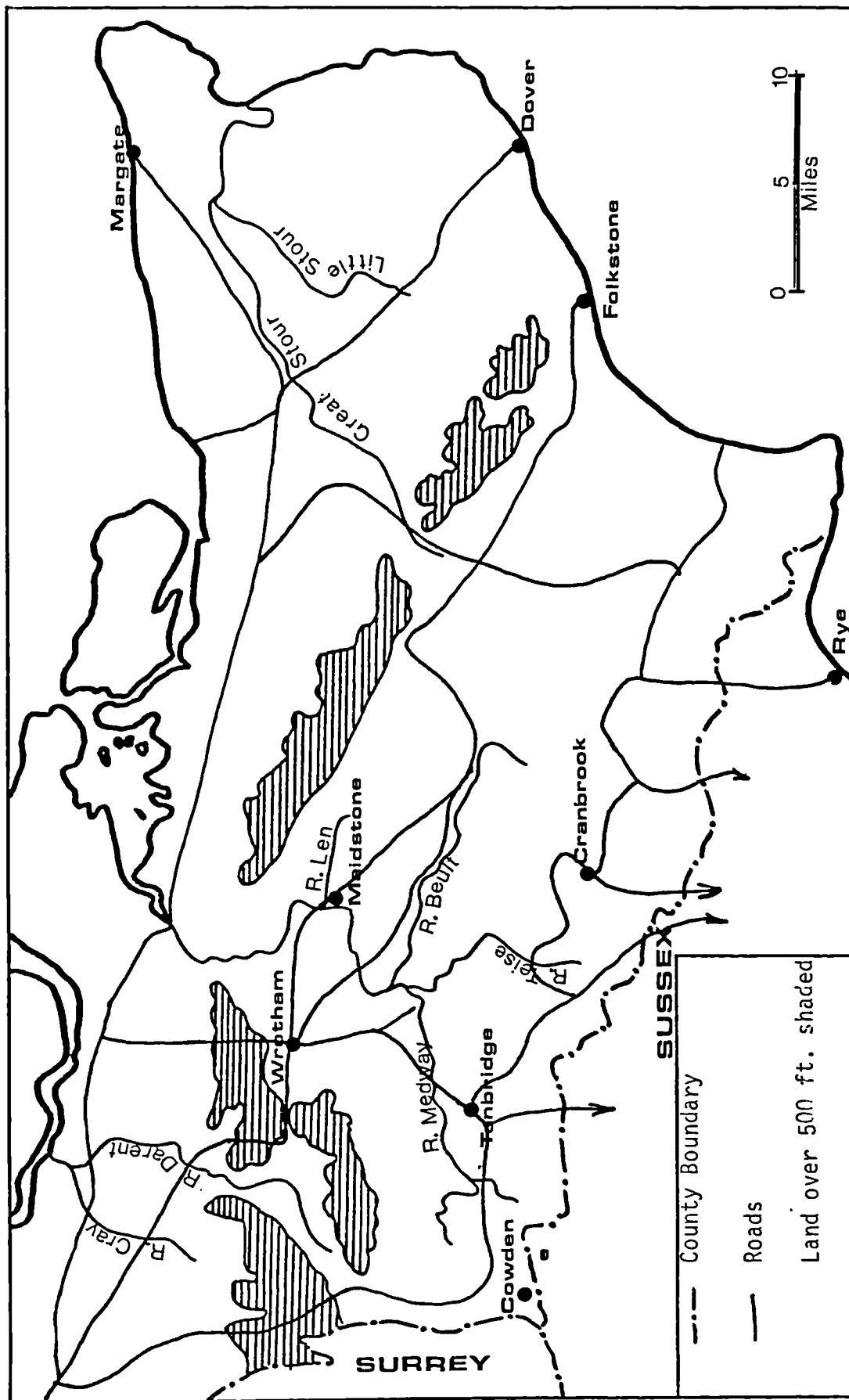
emerging as a spa town. This development reached its peak in the middle of the eighteenth century. Coupled with the extension of river traffic on the Medway by 1745, making Tonbridge an inland port, the town began to enter a century of unprecedented physical growth and commercial prosperity.⁽¹⁾ The parish was fortunate in possessing both a good supply of almshouses and charitable foundations. With adequate casual work available in the large parish, work for the capable old was widely available. The population grew rapidly in the late eighteenth century reaching 4,371 by the 1801 Census.⁽²⁾

The fifth parish, Wrotham, was situated in north west Kent at the foot of the North Downs, straddling west-east and north-south road crossings. Covering 9,000 acres⁽³⁾, it consisted of a small settlement, Wrotham Borough, a scattering of small hamlets and an extensive rural remainder. The widely dispersed population approached 2,000 in 1664 with 28.20 per cent non-chargeable.⁽⁴⁾ Agriculture constituted the main occupation, but there was also considerable peat cutting throughout the eighteenth century from Wrotham Heath.⁽⁵⁾

While population rise was only small, reaching only 2,561 by 1801,⁽⁶⁾ Wrotham was an exceptionally busy parish

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1. A.H.Neve. The Tonbridge of Yesterday. Tonbridge 1934 pp 103-113
 2. V.C.H. Vol III. p 370 (includes Tunbridge Wells)
 3. V.C.H. Vol III. p 368
 4. K.A.O. Q/RTh.
 5. E. Hasted. History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent. Canterbury 1799. Vol V. p 6
 6. V.C.H. Vol III. p 363

Figure 2.3 KENT
SHOWING RIVERS AND THREE MAIN ROUTES TO COAST



in summer months throughout the eighteenth century, reflecting the spreading hop and fruit orchards. Both roads running through the parish were popular with foot passengers wanting to reach the heart of Kent, for the casual work available in August and September.⁽¹⁾ Often near destitute, these travellers stretched the resources of the parish⁽²⁾, while the traffic was frequently exacerbated as the Kentish poor made for London in times of poor harvests; and by war when the roads were choked by military supplies and militiamen, followed by the families of the latter, often near destitution.⁽³⁾

All these five parishes were located in the central part of West Kent, then as now, overwhelmingly rural. Tiny market towns, except for Maidstone, were separated by large areas of farmland or woodland. Though many potential parish pensioners settled on marriage in small, isolated cottages tied to the farm on which they worked, and changed their dwellings with every change of work, every parish had a coherence which gave a sense of 'belonging'.⁽⁴⁾ Some rented cottages and worked as day labourers. Some few, with the aid of family or neighbours, built their own dwellings on wastes.⁽⁵⁾ When the day came that they were

1. Wm. Marshall. op cit. p 244

2. K.A.O. P 406/12/1-6

3. Ibid. Overseers Account books.

P 406/12/5 1761. Paid to families of militiamen £8.15.6d

P 406/12/7 1798 June. Gave to 235 women and children on passes £5.17.6d.

4. P. Clark. English Provincial Society from Reformation to Revolution 1500 - 1640. Hassocks. 1977. pp 118 - 125

5. K.A.O. P 371/8/1

no longer economic to employ, some were evicted, to be re-housed by the parish. Some were allowed to stay if the parish paid the rent, earning small sums during the busy farming year. Paul Prawll of Tonbridge, a labourer on Peach Hall Farm for most of his life, had his rent paid for the last eight years of his life, this being the only relief he required of the parish.⁽¹⁾

Landless labourers, from whom most pensioners were drawn, would have spent their entire lives, except for short periods, in work. They made ends meet by utilising the labour of husband, wife and older children; he dovetailed work in iron or cloth into the slack periods of agriculture; she spending the intervals between bringing up the children and performing her domestic duties in performing the less skilled tasks of cloth making, such as carding and spinning. She, and the children, might also find some seasonal work in farming, at hoeing, weeding, haymaking or harvesting. With the gradual disappearance of industrial employment, widespread under-utilisation of the available labour engendered the poverty so manifest in the Hearth Tax Returns of 1664. On reaching old age they could look forward to little more than to end their days as parish pensioners, their previous lives not being such as to be able to accumulate resources to end their days in some comfort. In view of the extent of the poverty, it is somewhat surprising that so few became pensioners. Most seem to have avoided it.

Small numbers notwithstanding, parishes had recognised

that the aged had a claim for maintenance from the early sixteenth century. This may have been the legacy of individual charitable effort for the good of one's soul, prevalent prior to the Reformation, or in response to repeated Tudor legislation, placing the responsibility for poor relief on the parishes.⁽¹⁾ Doles of money, payment of rent, food and care in sickness, and burial at parish expense, can all be traced in early parish records. Since the able bodied did not get relief in normal years, and only few new names appear, it is reasonable to suppose the vast majority of such names refer to the old. Their repetition from year to year, followed by a sudden cessation strengthens the supposition.⁽²⁾ West Kent was not unique in this matter for similar practices at this early date have been found elsewhere in the country.⁽³⁾

Documents for such an early date have not survived for the five selected parishes, but are available for Cowden and Maidstone from 1601; similar practices can be observed, which suggests that as far as the old, at least, were concerned, the 43 Elizabeth c.12 was as much a matter of the continuity of well tried successful custom as new legislation.⁽⁴⁾

The provisions of the Old Poor Law are so well known

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1. Sir R. Burns. History of the Poor Laws. London 1764 pp 62-63; pp 74-78; pp 85-89; p 91
 2. K.A.O. P 89/12/1 (Chiddingstone).
K.A.O. P 336/12/1/1 (Shorne)
 3. R.W. Emmisom. Poor Relief Accounts of Two Parishes in Bedfordshire 1563-1598 in Economic History Review. 1931-1932 pp 102-106
 4. K.A.O. P 99/12/1 (Cowden); K.A.O. P 241/12/1a (Maidstone)

that they will not be discussed in any detail here. There is, however, the need to be clear about its interpretation. This has varied from its being considered purely repressive, designed to control and regulate the poor so that all relief, even that for the aged, was contained within a framework of discipline and restraint⁽¹⁾, to a belief that they were genuinely and unambiguously poor laws, making no sharp distinction between various kinds of poverty, or attaching any stigma to pauperism. The only distinction made in the legislation was between various social groups who might experience poverty, such as the able-bodied, the old, the impotent and the orphan, making suitable provision for each.⁽²⁾ This study is concerned with a single social group, and in the light of the available evidence, it appears that whatever the original intention of the Tudor legislators, the effect was to improve somewhat the prospects of those most at risk from the permanent poverty of old age.

Responsibility for the welfare of the aged was, legally, the responsibility of the family. In practice, very few of the aged poor had any children who were able to accept this obligation. They had either settled elsewhere, died, or were themselves also poor. In addition, parishes often ignored the presence of children, even though they were well able to support their parents, and treated the old

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1. R. Cloward and F. Piven. Regulating the Poor. The Functions of Public Welfare. New York. 1972 p 21
E.M.Hampson. The Treatment of Poverty in Cambridgeshire 1597-1834. Cambridge 1934. Preface p XVI
 2. G. Himmelfarb. The Idea of Poverty in England in the Early Industrial Age. London 1984 p 160

as though they had a right to relief from the community when they became paupers.

Some examples may clarify attitudes.

Old Launcelot Watson and his second wife, both over seventy, had apparently reached destitution when in 1674 Tonbridge parish bought them a new bed, reclothed them and restocked their butcher's shop.⁽¹⁾ No approach was seemingly made for assistance to his son, also Launcelot, who had a thriving business a few hundred yards away in the busy High Street. The latter died in 1688 and his inventory shows him to have been well able to support his father, both financially and with house room.⁽²⁾

Similarly, Old Thomas Broomfield, aged 83, became a pensioner of Maidstone in April 1728. From then until his death four years later, he was a pensioner receiving attendance money and lodging money. Again, a son lived in close proximity. Thomas junior rented property worth five pounds a year and was himself overseer in 1731.⁽³⁾ There are other such examples, but they do not necessarily demonstrate lack of filial affection. The fathers may have been receiving assistance in other ways which do not appear in overseers accounts and which cannot now be recovered. In any case, the law gave parishes the right to acquire the entire property of a pensioner who had died, and to recover charges

1. K.A.O. P 371/12/1

2. K.A.O. DRb/P1/2/81 (1688)

3. K.A.O. P 241/11/6

from next of kin. It may often have paid the parish to act in this manner.⁽¹⁾

Parishes occasionally appealed to Quarter Sessions for orders compelling sons living in the same or adjacent parishes to support a parent.

In 1727, Cranbrook parish obtained an order from a Justice to compel Daniel Gyles, living in Frittenden, to support his father who was 'in want'.⁽²⁾

A similar warrant was obtained against one John Poyle in 1734.⁽³⁾ The reasons for these applications differ. Old Daniel Gyles was a non-parishioner, for whom Cranbrook had no legal responsibility. In John Poyle's case the parish had reached an impasse. Old Martha Poyle had been sent to the workhouse a year earlier, but had refused to stay and had removed herself on three occasions. After the last time the parish left her to fend for herself but by 1734 she was destitute and near starving.⁽⁴⁾

If the parishes had the power to compel children to support their parents, so also the aged themselves had power to appeal against any decisions affecting them which they considered to be unjust. These appeals could go through several stages, and finally reach Quarter Sessions. Old Thomas Parkes successfully appealed at Maidstone Sessions in December 1669, against Cranbrook parish who had refused him

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1. K.A.O. P 241/11/7. After his father's death, Thos. Broomfield, if tardily, repaid all expenses incurred by the parish for his father.
 2. K.A.O. P 100/12/3
 3. Ibid.
 4. Ibid.

a pension. The Justices granted him three shillings a month, insufficient to keep him without working at something. This may suggest that the parish, always hard put to maintain its pensioners, felt him to be capable of supporting himself entirely.⁽¹⁾

At Malling Petty Sessions in July 1749, the Tonbridge overseers were ordered to pay James Lumm an extra sixpence a week. Lumm had claimed to be old, blind in one eye and no longer able to work.⁽²⁾ Lumm did not profit from his apparent success with the Justices. The parish had become bankrupt by 1748 and was heavily in debt both to local tradesmen and to several prominent parishioners who had lent money to keep poor relief going. From 1747 there had been a steady reduction in the size of the pension list until it had disappeared by 1750. It is likely that Lumm went to the workhouse with the others.⁽³⁾

Within the framework set by the law, the parishes were able to work out their own standards of care for the aged. Much of this was a continuity of traditional methods, institutionalised and made systematic by the presence of a responsible officer, the overseer. Their accounts show considerable similarities in treatment between parish and parish. Such differences as there were resulted from the resources available and the efficiency of the parish officers. The per capita expenditure of Cowden, for example,

1. K.A.O. Q/SB/11 (1669)
2. K.A.O. PS/Ma 1.
3. K.A.O. P 371/12/4

is lavish when set alongside that of Cranbrook⁽¹⁾, yet case histories show very little difference in treatment, except for slightly higher pensions.⁽²⁾ Some of the rates may have been diverted into non-poor law functions⁽³⁾, but ratepayers always kept a sharp eye on expenditure, especially that of the overseers. Their authority was exercised either at the monthly vestries, or for more important decisions at the Annual Vestry when new overseers were chosen and rates were agreed. Their usual role seems to have been to criticise over-generosity or new initiatives on the part of the overseers.⁽⁴⁾

The role of the overseer was, nevertheless, crucial. It was his duty to search out the old and report their condition and his assessment of their needs at the next Vestry meeting, meanwhile giving them temporary relief. Vestry minutes have not survived in any great quantity but two entries from the Tonbridge Vestry Minutes make the point:

Mr. William Pack to call and see the Widow Jones and to relieve her according to her needs. (October 1764)
The overseers to meet and consider how best to relieve old deaf Knight, whether to pay his rent or to relieve

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1. See page 50
 2. K.A.O. P 99/12/1. P 100/12/1-3
 3. Cowden seemed to divert more of its poor rates towards non poor law functions than other parishes on such activities as keeping the stocks in good repair, mending the church roof and spire; and on 'entertainment' at meetings of parish officers, even for 'feasts for Psalm Singers'. P 99/12/2
 4. K.A.O. P 371/12/1 (1682)

him in some other way. (July 1765) ⁽¹⁾

Overseers also acted as the parish's roving officers. They attended Quarter Sessions regularly for Settlement cases; visited other parishes for discussions about the treatment of an old person where both parishes had an interest. They accompanied 'removed persons' to their new parish. Such activities gave them the opportunity of finding out how other parishes behaved and reporting back to their own Vestry. Friendly contacts provided scope for arranging mutually satisfactory arrangements to the settlement problems of the old, thus avoiding expensive court actions for themselves and cruel uprooting of old people from parishes where they had probably spent the greater part of their lives. The overseers of the parish of Ulcombe in North West Kent, during their application to remove a Widow, Anne Masters, back to Maidstone, came to an immediate agreement with the officers of the latter parish to allow her to remain in Ulcombe where she had lived all her married life. In return, Maidstone would shoulder all expenses.⁽²⁾

Tonbridge parish maintained Margery Cheeseman, a handicapped spinster, in Nettlestead parish, some ten miles away, from 1708 to 1715.⁽³⁾ Widow Betts, lived in Battle Sussex, for some twenty years as a pensioner of Cowden.⁽⁴⁾

1. K.A.O. P 371/8/1-2

K.A.O. P 371/8/10 a small notebook containing Vestry orders, including various items to be purchased and handed over to the pensioners before the next Vestry meeting.

2. K.A.O. P 241/11/1

3. K.A.O. P 371/12/2-3

4. K.A.O. P 99/12/2 (1746-1766)

Each parish had probably three or four such pensioners, mostly widows, being supported elsewhere. The predicament of such women was region-wide, since wives so often outlived their husbands. The close co-operation shown by the parishes solved both their own problems and those of the individuals and established norms of treatment for the aged which transcended the parish boundaries.

This inter-parish collaboration is a good example of how versatile the parish officers could be in finding short term solutions to their problems within the Old Poor Law. The prepared case histories reveal the same ability; to assess the situation and needs of each individual pensioner and to change the method of relief to suit the changing circumstances of the individual. At the same time they show up the rigidity of the whole mechanism. Once a system of relief was established, as in the cases mentioned above, it became almost impossible to change, or so it would seem. Parish officers in the main worked from year to year, following in the path of their predecessors. There were no contingency plans for dealing with future emergencies such as a poor harvest, or a major epidemic, which happened with depressing regularity. As all these emergencies invariably gave warning of their arrival, much hardship could have been avoided.

The pattern of relief for the aged which had already developed within a few years of the passing of the Old Poor Law remained relatively unchanged for two hundred years. It is not easy to pick out the treatment received by individual

pensioners after 1723 when parish after parish began to develop their workhouse systems. In addition, the increasing workload led to increasingly telescoped overseers' accounts so that details cannot be separated. To see the treatment of an aged pensioner in its matured state it is, therefore, necessary, to take an example from the late seventeenth century and the case of Widow Katherine Sheaf of Cranbrook will be considered in some detail and compared with that of Alice Hall of Tonbridge.

Richard Sheaf married Katherine Miller in Cranbrook in 1648, where they settled. A son, also named Richard, was born in 1649. Katherine's baptismal date was not discovered so she was allocated an age of 25 on marriage and 26 on the birth of her son.⁽¹⁾ She was widowed in 1678 when she would have been about fifty-five. From then until 1682 she received occasional relief from the parish during frequent periods of 'sickness'. In 1682 she was given a small pension. Now almost 60, her periodic extra payments for sickness suggest a frail old lady. The pension was only 2s6d a month, with the payment of her rent in addition. Even when bread was particularly cheap she could not maintain herself on just ninepence a week, which leads to the supposition that she was in receipt of some income over and above that given by the parish. No information comes to light until 1686 when the accounts record the purchase of 'cards',

1. Cranbrook Marriage Register. Register of Baptisms and Burials. K.A.O. TR 495/2-4. See Appendix II for technique of arriving at an approximate age.

strong evidence that Katherine was supplementing her pension by carding wool. This was a very common type of part-time employment in a cloth town for married women, and she had probably maintained herself in this way during the first few years of her widowhood.

More cards were supplied in 1690 and for the first time the overseers referred to her as old. She would now be around 70 years of age. A year later her pension was increased to 3s0d a month and the parish began supplying winter fuel, both strongly indicative of failing powers. By 1691 her physical decline becomes obvious for in June she was allowed 11s0d for sickness and was removed from her own home to be lodged with a younger widow, who was paid sixpence a week for her house room.⁽¹⁾ Her pension was increased to 1s6d a week. This sum, small though it now seems, was sufficient in the late seventeenth century to provide an aged person with the basics of sustenance when bread was at a reasonable price.⁽²⁾

The parish was by now providing all the basic necessities of life; shelter, rent, fuel and sufficient money to provide diet of sorts. It must now be assumed that Katherine Sheaf was past work and any improvement in her condition would come from sources other than poor relief for, from now until her death in 1692, the overseers' accounts contain little but routine entries.⁽³⁾

1. K.A.O. P 100/12/2

2. This matter is considered in detail in the Chapter on pensions.

3. K.A.O. P 100/12/2

It is clear from this case history that despite sickness, in Cranbrook at least, widows of even fairly advanced age were not automatically awarded a pension on the death of their spouses, nor at any particular age thereafter, but were expected to go on supporting themselves to the best of their ability until their powers failed. It is in line with the practice of other parishes that, though her son Richard lived in Cranbrook town throughout the entire seventeen years of his mother's widowhood, there is no record of the parish ever approaching him to support his mother. Since he himself became a parish pensioner, and one of the first inmates of the new workhouse in 1722, it is reasonable to conclude that his poverty was as great as his mother's and he was in no position to help.⁽¹⁾

These biographical notes of Katherine Sheaf are probably representative of the maximum benefit that a parish with severely restricted resources could do for its pensioners. Even those with more resources did not treat them all that more generously, but expected less in return. Alice Hall of Tonbridge, was widowed at 70 in 1689. There were no children and Alice was now entirely dependent on the community.⁽²⁾ Within one week of her husband's death she was granted a pension of 3s0d a month, rent of one pound a year and one hundred faggots each winter.⁽³⁾ The actual money

1. K.A.O. P 100/12/3

K.A.O. Transcripts of Registers. TR 495/2-4

2. K.A.O. P 371/12/2

K.A.O. Transcripts of Registers. TR 2451/1-2

3. K.A.O. P 371/12/1-2

dole is again small, but there is no evidence that she ever worked for payment. Tonbridge, in contrast to Cranbrook, had a number of small charities concerned with the distribution of bread. Few lists of recipients survive, but the overseers accounts for 1691 contain such a list in which the name of Alice Hall appears, receiving a fourpenny loaf.⁽¹⁾ Two or three of these added considerably to the value of the pension over a month, some of which could now be spent on other foodstuffs. She was also given new clothing annually. Richer parishes, though not giving pensions much higher than poorer parishes, were able to do considerably more in the way of relief in kind for their pensioners. They were better dressed, they received bread and money from charities. Cranbrook bought very little in the way of new clothing or such things as furniture or kitchen utensils, relying heavily on second-hand gifts or the proceeds of sales of deceased persons' goods.

Alice Hall's physical deterioration in 1695 led to an increase of her pension to 1s3d a week, moving to an almshouse in shared accommodation, where Widow Green earned the occasional threepence or sixpence for 'attending' to her.⁽²⁾

While neither Katherine Sheaf nor Alice Hall received much in the way of a pension, the latter was much better off materially. No bread or clothing seemed to figure to any extent in the Cranbrook relief. In addition, Tonbridge, though in doing so it formally broke the law, passed in

1. K.A.O. P 371/12/2

2. Ibid.

Vestry in 1682, that all aged pensioners be permitted to collect 'broken victuals' from their neighbours or within the parish boundaries at certain specified hours. For recognition purposes, those who came into the category wore a badge on their begging journeys.⁽¹⁾ This practice undoubtedly improved the pensioners diets.

This pattern of relief for the old, once established, became fixed and seemingly unchangeable and followed a certain sequence; at first a small pension with work; when no longer capable of work, additional items were added. Physical disability was accompanied by removal into shared accommodation. After 1723 the same procedure was continued for those who remained outside the workhouse, but they become difficult to identify in the accounts. It has been argued that this face to face contact, though not generous, brought a greater humanity in the treatment of the aged than was ever possible after 1834.⁽²⁾ In the following chapters, this 'humanity' can be seen in action, beginning with relief in kind.

1. K.A.O. P 371/12/1 (1682)

2. J.D. Marshall. The Old Poor Law 1795-1834. London 1968
p 9

CHAPTER THREE - RELIEF IN KIND AND THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Introduction: The Role of the Aged

Relief in kind was infinite in its variety, embracing anything that constituted a need. It thus included housing and the payment of rents, provision of clothing and fuel, the replacement of worn out furniture, bedding and working tools, the redeeming of pawned goods; medicines, nursing care and the final service the parish could render, the pensioner's burial. The way in which these needs were satisfied provided the environment in which the aged lived out their lives.

Discussion in this chapter, by its very nature, will be wide ranging. The evidence in the sources themselves is far from systematic, and considerable importance has been attached to the findings and conclusions of others, whose contributions have been acknowledged in the references. Criteria by which to judge the physical quality of their lives, their lives and aspirations they still retained, are difficult to formulate. Even the poorest of day labourers, with the assistance of their wives and children, had some freedom of movement. They moved from place to place in search of work, hiring themselves out to employers of their own choice either for higher wages or better living conditions, despite occasional setbacks from the application of the Settlement Laws. There is ample evidence that landless labourers were on the move from time to time, and

many did not remain in the same parish all their lives.⁽¹⁾

Once an aged individual became chargeable to the parish, there was henceforth little he or she could do in the management of their own circumstances. From then on it was the Vestry, through the overseers, who had the greatest say in deciding where, with whom, and how they would live. The standard of living they would enjoy, or within which they would live in misery, would result from the dovetailing together of the many and varied services which the parish provided. The pension was the most widespread and ubiquitous of these services to the aged, but to concentrate too much on this is to ignore the many subtle ways in which traditional communities conferred benefits on the old living in their midst. Laying too much stress on the doles of money carries with it the implication that all the poverty of old age required for its solution was the simple injection of money. While this theory may have some relevance for the late twentieth century, the standard of living of the seventeenth and eighteenth century pensioner depended on the

1. P. Clark. the Migrant in Kentish Towns in P. Clark and P. Slack (eds) Crisis and Order in English Towns. London 1972 pp 117-164 See also:-
Tonbridge Petty Sessions Minute Book. K.A.O. PS/T
Malling Petty Sessions. K.A.O. PS/Ma. 1 - 2
Maidstone Quarter Sessions Minute Books.
K.A.O. Q/S/Ma. 1677 - 1800

total contribution of several systems of relief, some of which were received by the pensioner directly from the parish, others obtainable by his own efforts, and yet others through the intervention of external agencies such as charitable organisations, the largess of local landowners or sudden unexpected distributions of money from the will of a local benefactor. Each of these systems was apportioned according to some locally sanctioned principle. Those eligible to receive bread at the church door, for example, might have to be partakers of the Lord's Supper regularly.⁽¹⁾ Assessing the part played by these various agencies is now complicated by the fact that many of the documents relating to them are no longer discoverable, even if they ever existed. The indisputable fact is that their presence in any quantity would have made a difference to the comfort of the aged.

It follows that the condition of the aged poor would be better in some parishes than in others, and could vary from year to year, depending on their numbers. A hard winter, for instance, could result in a high mortality among the aged, leaving reduced numbers to be supported in the following months. Flooding in September 1668 in Maidstone, affecting many almshouses, followed by a particularly cold January and February, carried off half the pensioners from 'sickness', a reduction of fifteen.⁽²⁾

1. K.A.O. P 371/12/3

2. K.A.O. P 241/11/1 and Burial Records, All Saint's Church, Maidstone.

Their circumstances would also depend on the attitude of the rest of the community, their willingness to do more for them than just pay the rates; even their ability just to pay the rates might also be an important factor. The general depression from which Cranbrook suffered in the eighteenth century following the decay of the cloth industry meant nearly sixty per cent of the population were in poverty.⁽¹⁾ Even while there was empty property all over the parish, the authorities were crowding three to four pensioners into one house; an apparently unfeeling attitude to the aged which on investigation might seem more an act of desperation to house them in the most economical way.⁽²⁾

Discussion can only remain at the factual level, depending on the sources, and directed only at the physical environment. Any assessment of the quality of their lives, their expectations, their values and beliefs, remain the realms of supposition and guesswork, but that they were still able to play a useful role in the community is shown by the variety of useful work they performed for the parish. Their pay was extremely small, and it may be supposed that the performance of some kind of work, even for no pay, would satisfy some psychological need, or that having lived a long life of unremitting labour, in old age their aspirations never extended beyond the work ethos until decrepitude overtook them.⁽³⁾

1. K.A.O. Q/Rth (Hearth Tax)

2. K.A.O. P 100/12/3-6

3. P. Townsend. Poverty in the United Kingdom. London 1979
p 50

The aged are a socially placid group, and the aged pensioners of the Old Poor Law seem to have accepted their lot. Though they had the right of appeal to the justices about their grievances, it seems that this right was exercised only infrequently. A Robert Warden of Tonbridge complained to Thomas Dalyson JP that being old and blind in one eye he could not maintain himself, but that the Tonbridge Vestry had withdrawn his pension of a shilling a week. The parish was ordered to increase the pension to one and six a week and to maintain it at that level unless they could give good reason to the contrary.⁽¹⁾

In 1728 the following entry is to be found in the Maidstone accounts:- "Paid to Goodwife Clapson, by consent of my brethren, £4.0.0. she promising not to be troublesome to us any more".⁽²⁾ Some old pensioners, in their various ways, could be very troublesome. Goody Clapson was clearly a thorn in the flesh of the overseers; Old Martha Poyle of Cranbrook was another. Widowed in 1692, she had earned a living for many years boarding orphans, beginning with the two daughters of her stepson Thomas. When the parish considered her too old to work any more, she was sent to the workhouse, from which she promptly removed herself. For three years prior to this event in 1729, the parish had obtained order after order from Quarter Sessions to get her son John, living in Frittenden, to support her. A further

1. K.A.O. P 371/16/1. 1747
2. K.A.O. P 241/11/6

summons producing no response, Martha was taken to the workhouse again, only to depart once more. She lived in near destitution in Cranbrook town for two more years, having no support from her stepson, and only occasional hand-outs from the parish. By late 1733, her condition was so bad that the parish appealed to Quarter Sessions for a warrant to compel her into the workhouse where she died in March 1734.(1)

Housing

Vestry Minutes and overseers' accounts convey an impression of great zeal among some parishes for organising the pensioners, seeming to move them around from one dwelling to another. There was always a constant switching round of the occupants of parish almshouses as former occupiers died or were removed to the workhouse.(2)

Pensioners occupying rented accommodation frequently found themselves being moved to cheaper accommodation;(3) a solitary, becoming sick or frail, was moved into lodgings(4), or pensioners requiring frequent visits, if they lived in an outlying rural part, were brought closer to the centre, where overlooking would be less time consuming.(5)

This process is particularly visible in the Cranbrook ratebooks, where the pensioners were listed in the houses they occupied, but not chargeable for rates, though the

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1. K.A.O. P 100/12/3
 2. K.A.O. P 241/11/1-6. P 371/12/1-6
 3. K.A.O. P 371/12/1-3. P 100/12/2-3
 4. K.A.O. P 371/12/1 P 406/12/2
 5. K.A.O. P 371/12/4 P 100/12/2-4

parish itself would be paying the rents. Most of them are multiple households. The clerks always listed the houses in the same manner, going through the parish following the same route each year, house by house, so that changes of occupancy are readily detectable. Year by year the occupants of some parish houses change, to turn up in another, giving the impression of a constant shuffling around of the aged. When the process is examined more closely, it is found that particular individuals were moved only once or twice during their entire pension lives. It is unlikely that they would regard this as any great hardship since moving from cottage to cottage, as they changed their employers, had been an integral part of their previous lives.⁽¹⁾

It was less necessary in other parishes where the problem of poverty and balancing the books was less pressing than in Cranbrook. It cannot be termed cruelty even in Cranbrook, though there was obviously curtailment of free movement. Problems of accommodation for the aged were acute in most of the parishes, whether there were parish almshouses or not. In the overcrowded towns like Maidstone and Cranbrook, because of high in-migration, the demand always exceeded the supply; in Cranbrook because of the lack of almshouses and the widespread poverty of the ratepayers and in Maidstone because of overcrowding, resort had to be made to renting single rooms in the houses of other poor people or in communal living. This was before the advent of

1. K.A.O. P 100/12/1-3. Clark and Slack. op cit. pp117-164

the workhouse which, for all its faults, at least solved the problem of accommodation.

Where pensioners were few in number, as in the rural parishes of Cowden and Wrotham, or where the officers and the administration was more efficient and well endowed with almshouses, as was the case with Tonbridge and Maidstone, more time could be devoted to securing better arrangements for the old, ensuring less disturbance in the future. But it was never certain that two widows housed together would live harmoniously, and on one occasion at least, the Maidstone officers had to divide an almshouse with a brick partition through the centre in order to secure harmony between the two occupants.⁽¹⁾ This inability of some old women to get on with each other may be an alternative cause of the apparent shuffling of pensioners from dwelling to dwelling, rather than the whim of the overseers.

Some efforts appear to have been directed in all parishes to secure compatible pairings. Sisters have been found sharing the same almshouses⁽²⁾, older pensioners with younger ones, who are usually their daughters or daughters-in-law, widowed early,⁽³⁾ old men, either bachelors or widowers, lodging with widows who also provided attendance⁽⁴⁾.

1. K.A.O. P 241/11/7 Almshouses in Stone Street

2. K.A.O. P 99/12/2 The Widows Paris and Randall in Cowden
The Widows Lavender and Hearnden in Maidstone

3. K.A.O. P 371/12/4 The two Widows Pinson in Tonbridge
Widow Green and her daughter Widow Hawkes in
Hildenborough (Tonbridge)

4. K.A.O. P 371/12/2 Benjamin Ashdowne lodged with Widow
Pawley (Tonbridge)

K.A.O. P100/12/2 Old Knight lodged with Widow Berry
(Cranbrook)

Though some widows have been found to have spent many long years of widowhood living alone, this was not a common practice among parish pensioners, since accommodation was always at a premium. If they were living alone, there must have been good reason and the most obvious one to speculate upon is that these were the ones who did not get on with others. The view that in pre-industrial England the old were left to live and die alone is as much in need of qualification as that which places them in the centre of a loving caring family.⁽¹⁾ Solitaries in old age were not paupers unless they were beneficiaries under some charitable trust which specified one occupant to each almshouse; most of these solitaries were the widows of small tradesmen who had carried on the business or who had inherited a little money or land, sufficient to allow them to earn a little income by renting out or lending at interest, even by keeping some livestock. Even these might be forced on the parish when they outlived their savings or could not meet the outgoings of a poor year. This was the case with old Widow Chalklin of Wrotham who struggled to keep the smallholding going on the death of her husband Old Henry Chalklin in 1788, the parish assisting her on occasions with the rent of three pounds, or giving feed for her few animals.⁽²⁾

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1. P. Laslett. The World we have Lost. London (2nd ed.) 1971 p 96
P. Laslett. Family Love and Illicit Love in Earlier Generations. Cambridge 1975. pp 174-179.
 2. K.A.O. P 406/12/6

Most parishes had a stock of rent free housing for the poor, which were used by young widows and children, the chronic sick wage earner, as well as by parish aged. These would have been acquired in various ways; from charitable bequests, from owners not able or willing to carry out repairs and who allowed the parish to use them in lieu of paying rates, and relinquishing the rent in return for the parish carrying out necessary repairs. Occasionally they inherited the property of deceased persons who had no descendants or other kin. After the death of John Whately in 1694, Cranbrook obtained a warrant from the justices to have the house, the property of Whately's wife, also deceased, transferred to them, no kin having come forward to claim it.⁽¹⁾ They obtained the dwellings of a Widow Osborne and of Richard Hearne in the same way, nearly a century later.⁽²⁾ Such acquisitions took the place of their non-existent almshouses.

The Law of 1601 permitted parishes to build houses for the poor on wastes, provided landowners and others with interests in the wastes had no objection. Little advantage seems to have been taken of this clause. The costs do not seem to have been prohibitive. Cowden erected a dwelling to house two poor families on Somerden Green in 1627. While this was, in essence, the purchase and renovation of a tumbled-down existing structure, the cost was only fourteen pounds.⁽³⁾ Tonbridge incurred costs of thirty pounds in

1. K.A.O. P 100/12/2

2. K.A.O. P 100/12/6 (1778)

3. K.A.O. P 99/12/1

putting up a similar structure in Hildenborough in 1683⁽¹⁾, making two dwellings of a single room and lean-to.

Such low costs could not result in anything but a structure of flimsy character but would, nevertheless, represent a good investment for the parish, since it would last between fifteen and twenty years before requiring major repairs. Some building was even cheaper. In 1602, the materials for building an almshouse in Chiddingstone cost only thirty-five shillings and eight pence.⁽²⁾ The reluctance of parishes to build their own almshouses for the old seems to have been the strong resistance on the part of the ratepayers to such activity, especially among those who had grazing and other rights on wastes and commons and who would not hesitate to take strong measures to frustrate it. An incident concerning Cowden's almshouses on Somerden Green is typical of the kind of reaction which took place. Quarter Sessions (Maidstone) dealt with a claim by Cowden for damages from the adjacent parish of Chiddingstone, the boundary of which passed very close to their almshouses and for payment of the costs of one Robert Chapman, who had provided food and lodging for the four inhabitants of the almshouses for five weeks after Richard Children and his companions, parishioners of Chiddingstone, had pulled the

1. M.W. Barley. Rural Building in England and Wales in: J. Thirsk (ed) *Ag. Hist. England and Wales. Vol. V* London 1985. p 677

"A small peasant house, for which building costs have been accurately computed from estate records, was built in Dursby, Lincs. in 1679 for £12.4.1. It included glazing for two windows, suggestive of two rooms only."

2. K.A.O. P 98/12/1

thatch from the house. It is not easy to conclude from the surviving records whether this was an act of pure vandalism or a real attempt to destroy the almshouse. The justices thought the latter and ordered Chiddingstone to pay the full costs.⁽¹⁾

The long list of rents paid yearly by every parish is ample evidence that the supply of parish accommodation, in which the old ended up, never kept pace with the demand and the parishes had to pay the rents of entire cottages, or of one room, to put a roof over the heads of their pensioners. Even when workhouses relieved some of the pressure, rents often continued to be paid to avoid eviction for non-payment which could only compound the problem.⁽²⁾ Most of the old, permanent pensioners were moved into rent-free parish accommodation at the earliest possible moment. They were now free of distraining landlords but whether such a move gave them a feeling of security is not possible to say. They were still not free from the occasional move by the parish officers and, during those periods when the parish was pursuing a vigorous workhouse policy, they would usually be among the most vulnerable. Insecurity and vulnerability would appear to have been the lot of the old in more senses

1. K.A.O. P 98/12/1 Q/SB 10. (1664)

K.A.O. P 99/12/1

2. Report of Select Committee on the Poor Laws, 1815 p163.

In the evidence concerning Cranbrook:- "The high price of cottages is very hurtful to the poor, and the parish has always been necessitated to assist very much in the payment of the rents, or the poor man's goods would be sold and he may be turned destitute upon the parish."

than one.⁽¹⁾

It made good economic sense for the parishes to pay the rents of the old, especially males. It was frequently the case that an old man only required the security of a roof over his head; and he could earn enough by jobbing to keep himself for several years as well as his wife. Old Prawll, formerly a living-in servant at Peach Hall Farm, Tonbridge, was allowed to continue living in a tied cottage, the parish paying the rent of one pound a year, he meanwhile doing casual work about the farm. This continued until his death eight years later in 1679 at the age of seventy-four.⁽²⁾

Edward Black had received sixpence a week towards his rent for six years when the Maidstone overseers, on their annual search of the parish for those in want, found him dressed in rags and with literally no possessions except a bundle of straw on which he slept. This was in 1692 when Black would have been about eighty-two years old. These entries give the impression that for the previous year he had been unable to work and had been selling off his goods in order to survive.⁽³⁾ Cornelius Pollard of Maidstone made a poor sort of living growing and selling quickset for hedging, the parish subsidising him by paying his rent and making occasional gifts of clothing.⁽⁴⁾

None of these dwellings were in good condition. Labourers' cottages have been described as 'one or two

1. P. Stearns. Old Age in European Society. London 1977 p252

2. K.A.O. P 371/12/1

3. K.A.O. P 241/11/3-4

4. K.A.O. P 241/11/4

roomed hovels of sticks and dirt'.⁽¹⁾ Many almshouses were little better. At the suppression of the Fraternity of Corpus Christi, IEdw. VI. (1547), Maidstone Corporation purchased several cottages and tenements, 'wherein poor and impotent persons inhabited without payment'.⁽²⁾ There were about twenty in all and they continued in use until the eighteenth century, the most ruinous of all, six situated in Pudding Lane, being demolished in 1670.⁽³⁾ A cottage, situated in Stone Street, bequeathed to Maidstone parish in 1594 to be rented out to raise money for stock for the poor, remained in use until it and a number of other adjacent almshouses were demolished in 1811 for town improvements.⁽⁴⁾

The shortage of brick making materials locally meant that these almshouses were invariably timber framed, with clay, wattle or mud infilling. Lighting was provided by one window, sometimes glazed but often open, draught being excluded by a shutter. The exit of smoke was effected by a gap in the roof. Lime washed and rudely thatched, each was usually provided with a small close or garden.⁽⁵⁾ They were very vulnerable to the effects of the weather. The infilling could be washed away in heavy rain, the framework blown askew or even destroyed by high winds.⁽⁶⁾ All were

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1. Everitt in Thirsk (ed) Agricultural History. Vol IV p 442
 2. Edw. Hasted. History of the County of Kent. Vol IV Canterbury 1798. p 312
 3. Maidstone Records. Burgmote Book IV. Maidstone 1926. p156
 4. Report of Charity Commissioners (Kent). London 1817. p508
 5. H. Batsford and C. Fry. The English Cottage (2nd ed) London 1944. p 17
 6. K.A.O. P 100/12/2; K.A.O. P 241/11/2-3

particularly at risk from fire.⁽¹⁾

In the centre of most towns there were often a group of contiguous cottages, a legacy from a local charitable foundation. Petley's Almshouses in Tonbridge were one such group. Built in 1704, and costing two hundred pounds, the six small dwellings remained occupied until 1866 when they were re-erected elsewhere to make room for town improvements. By that time they were in an advanced state of disrepair.⁽²⁾

Jackson's Charity established six almshouses in the centre of Cowden village in 1665. These were small tenements of two rooms and remained in use until 1800, each housing two paupers.⁽³⁾ Many small Wealden towns had whole streets of tiny two roomed cottages, originally intended to house the landless labourers who spent slack periods working for the cloth industry. Most had reasonably sized gardens behind and made suitable places to house two or three aged paupers. Those in Cranbrook remain to this day, re-edified or forming the core of later additions.⁽⁴⁾ Many were built in about three to four hours, further evidence of flimsy construction but also giving a foundation to the common belief that a cottage built on waste overnight would be in the undisputed possession of the builder. They were prefabricated

1. K.A.O. P 99/12/1

2. M. Barker Read. the Tonbridge High Street Improvements, 1892-1920 in: C.W.Chaklin (ed) Late Victorian Tonbridge. Maidstone 1987.

3. K.A.O. P99/12/1

4. K. Gravett. Timber and Brick Buildings in Kent. London 1971. p 15

structures, roughly shaped wood framing being brought to a site and assembled; and quickly infilled and thatched.⁽¹⁾ It was not beyond the capacity of a labourer, during a reasonably prosperous spell to build a shelter for himself and his family provided he could find a piece of land in an unobtrusive spot. Many would remain in use during the lifetime of the builder and his immediate family and then be allowed to decay⁽²⁾, or be taken over by the parish as rent free housing.

In 1733, the Tonbridge Vestry upheld the claim of Clement Ring to the possession of a dwelling he had built for himself on some waste ground behind Tonbridge High Street and which he had enjoyed for many years without molestation. The land was now being claimed by Richard Mapleson, physician, who had recently built himself a messuage fronting the High Street. The right of Clement's widow to the property was also upheld in 1738.⁽³⁾ There seems a certain amount of self interest on the part of the parish here for Ring, being a poor man, would become chargeable to the parish if he lost his home. He himself never became a pensioner but his wife and daughter-in-law did and by 1775, four generations of this same family were on parish relief simultaneously; Widow Jane Ring, her son Thomas, her grand-daughter Ann and her two illegitimate

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1. R.O.Sayce. Popular Enclosures and the One Night House. pub. by College for the History of Architecture. Montgomeryshire Vol. XIVIII Part II. Quoted in G.E. Fussell. The English Rural Labourer. London 1949. p 9
 2. K.A.O. P 371/8/1
 3. K.A.O. P 371/12/5

children. The savings in rent to Tonbridge parish over the years must have been enormous.⁽¹⁾

With regular repairs these cottages remained usable for many generations. Both thatch and walls required attention at regular intervals, and overseers accounts are full of references to such activities, and repairs to parish property was as frequent and as large an item of expenditure as was rent. Cowden had to undertake extensive renovation of Jackson's Almshouses less than twenty years after they had been entirely rebuilt following a disastrous fire in 1668.⁽²⁾ A group of almshouses near the Bridge in Maidstone were repaired in 1726 at a cost of four pounds four shillings, again in 1742 for three pounds eighteen shillings and, yet again, in 1763 for three pounds twelve shillings.⁽³⁾ It was an expense which did not entirely disappear with the acquisition of a workhouse, for the almshouses continued in use throughout the eighteenth century and beyond.

Most almshouses used to shelter the aged consisted of one bay only, occasionally having a lean-to addition. They generally were divided into two small chambers; one, the hall, for day time use, and a sleeping chamber. Both rooms were used as sleeping accommodation with more than one occupant. In cold weather all the pensioners used the hall for living and sleeping as being the only heated space.

1. K.A.O. P 371/12/5

2. G. Ewing. op. cit. (Cowden) p 126

3. K.A.O. P 241/11/5-6

Of low one-storied construction, with a trodden earth or clay floor, they were built by local craftsmen, of local materials, in traditional manner, 'by hand and eye' so no plans have survived, but they are occasionally mentioned in deeds; and accounts of estates enable some idea to be formed of costs and size by calculation.⁽¹⁾

A surviving deed of 1507 mentions two houses to be built for Giles Andrew of Cranbrook. The smaller was to be eighteen feet long and fifteen feet wide, with a partition, and to have two windows and a door, 'as customary for such an house'. It was to be roofed with thatch.⁽²⁾ This is an early example of such a construction but, as already indicated, they remained in use for generations.

Archaeological evidence from other parts of England suggests that all housing destined for the poor was of one bay

construction like the above and sometimes even smaller.⁽³⁾

Since chimneys and fireplaces are not mentioned in the deed, it must be assumed that the house conformed to the Wealden vernacular architecture of the period in having a central hearth and smoke would escape through spaces in the thatch. The rent for a cottage of this size and age would, by the late seventeenth century, vary from ten shillings to a pound a year, depending on its condition and whether there had been any structural additions such as a lean-to or a chimney and 'down' hearth on one wall.⁽⁴⁾

1. Sayce in Fussell. op. cit. pp 9-11

2. K.A.O. Ch 4/9

3. Beresford and Hurst. op.cit. pp 117-118

4. K.A.O. P 371/12/1-4. P 100/12/1-3

It was quite common in the iron producing Weald of Kent for the central hearth to have a base of cast iron, designed for burning logs which would be supported on andirons.⁽¹⁾

Sometimes these iron hearths were raised on bricks or stones eliminating the need for fuel supports, a more common feature in the dwellings of the poor, since andirons are rarely to be found in the inventories of the poor's goods. This allowed a space beneath the hearth in which ashes accumulated under the hottest part of the fire. Cottages of later date, often from the late seventeenth century, had a 'down' hearth, formed by a layer of clay or brick placed against one wall, connected to an outside chimney, in most cases having a Wealden iron fire back, which radiated heat towards the centre of the room. Neither hearth allowed of much elaborate cooking until ovens were installed in the late eighteenth century.⁽²⁾

Wood, the chief fuel, had to be used sparingly by the poor. By the end of the seventeenth century it had become scarce and expensive in West Kent. It was subject to increasing demands, for hop poles for the growing industry, for house building for the growing towns and for ship building in the burgeoning dockyard towns.⁽³⁾ These placed added strain on the forests and woodlands, already much denuded by the demands of the old industries of iron working and cloth making. Parishes do not appear to have been mean

1. T. West. The Timber Framed House in England. Newton Abbott. 1970 p 96.

2. G. Jekyll. Old English Country Life. London 1925. p 14

3. Chalklin. op. cit. p 132

in their provision of fuel for the old and sick, though many of them doubtless followed their lifelong habits of gathering winter fuel in summer and after storms. The purchase of wood for both named and unnamed individuals was a regular item of expenditure in all parishes. Cranbrook distributed fuel to twenty-two pensioners in 1704. By 1722, the list was forty-nine⁽¹⁾ This was in addition to the several loads of timber provided free each winter by John Cooke, the local landowner and Justice of the Peace.⁽²⁾ One of the perquisites of the occupants of the Cowden almshouses was to have a free delivery each November of one hundred faggots of wood.⁽³⁾ A faggot was a sizeable quantity of wood, its size, like that of bread, being determined by statute. It was to be between three and four feet long and twenty-four inches in girth.⁽⁴⁾ In essence, therefore, it was a large heavy log which would burn slowly for weeks, since the fire hazard in the fragile cottages of the old would preclude a brightly burning fire likely to shower the hall with sparks. Once lit at the beginning of winter the fire was never allowed to go out until Spring, and the accumulating ashes were never removed for they served several purposes. By curtailing the up draught the rate of combustion was reduced, both an economical measure and reducing the danger of fire. When an elderly occupant was

1. K.A.O. P 100/12/3

2. K.A.O. P 100/8/1

3. K.A.O. P 99/12/1-2

4. R. Burns. The Justice of the Peace and Parish Officer. (18th ed.) 1797. Vol. II. p 358. (43 Eliz. c. 14)

able to do a little baking, it was a matter of moments to scrape a hollow under the hearth and heap the hot ashes around the food. This heap also served a further important function. As it was always very hot and got bigger daily, it heated both the floor beneath and around the fire, and radiated heat in all directions, ensuring a circle of warmth, several feet in diameter all round the fire.⁽¹⁾ Old occupants would thus spend most of their waking and sleeping hours within this circle or semicircle of 'central heating' depending on where the fire was placed. The furniture, however sparse, would be placed in suitable spots to avoid the cold and draught. It may well be that this apparently very primitive form of heating was more effective in preventing hypothermia than are the sophisticated and expensive systems of the 1980's. The old of today are not as secure as they could be, and increased winter mortality, resulting directly or indirectly from cold, would on occasions seem to be little better than those of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁽²⁾ On the other hand, life in a society where fuel was scarce and expensive, nutrition was poor and the insulation of dwellings non-existent, could and did lead, in extreme winter conditions to an increase of pneumonic type infections among the aged. Dying directly from the cold was a fate which the pensioner under the Old Poor Law seems to have escaped, though it

1. Jekyll. op. cit. p 14

2. Jones. Seasons and Prices. op. cit. p 27

sometimes overtook vagrants.⁽¹⁾

As the staple diet of the pensioner was mainly bread and cheese⁽²⁾, it required little cooking so utensils for the purpose were few, limited as a rule to a cooking pot, skillet, a frying pan and a kettle. When Widow King was removed from Headcorn parish to Maidstone in 1724, since she had no goods of her own, they found her a cottage and furnished it with a bed, a cooking pot and a skillet. This seems to have been considered adequate furnishing.⁽³⁾ The aged might have a few other cooking utensils like a tongs or a fork, but little else. Other furnishings were also minimal, consisting of not much more than a bed or a straw pallet, possibly a chair, more often a sawn off log, some tools for work and a few clothes. When these pauper pensioners died and were buried by the parish, it was the custom to sell their goods to help recover some of the costs. The sums raised were often minute. The goods of Widow Miller of Maidstone, dying in 1687 aged 78, fetched six shillings and eight pence⁽⁴⁾ while those of Widow French dying twenty years later, at the age of 70, raised ten shillings.⁽⁵⁾ Many deceased's goods raised much less. The smallness of these sums are very suggestive either that the goods were so old and worn as to have little or no saleable

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1. K.A.O. P 371/12/2. 'Paid for burying a stranger found dead in the snow in Mr. Martin's barn.'
 2. Diet and the standards of nutrition will be considered in detail in a subsequent chapter.
 3. K.A.O. P 241/11/4
 4. K.A.O. P 241/11/5
 5. K.A.O. P 241/11/3

value, or that goods had been sold during hard times and never replaced. This may well have been the state of affairs with old Elizabeth Miller, whose husband had also been a pensioner of Maidstone for nine years before his death two years earlier at the age of eighty-three.⁽¹⁾ Similar sums were being raised at the same time in other parishes. Widow Lane's things fetching fifteen shillings, and Widow Ashby's only two shillings in Tonbridge in 1690.⁽²⁾ After parishes built their workhouses it became more customary to take all deceased pensioners' property to the workhouse stores, where some usable things were removed and the rest sold at an annual workhouse sale, similar to that which took place in Cranbrook in 1734, when the sale of clothes and other goods raised four pounds two shillings and sixpence.⁽³⁾

That pawning of goods was common among all the poor, old and young, can be taken for granted by the large number of entries in account books of parishes redeeming their goods. As early as 1676, Maidstone parish is noted as redeeming goods, for example, giving Mary Collins a shilling to redeem her wheel.⁽⁴⁾ In Cranbrook the parish paid two shillings and sixpence for a coat in pawn in 1739, and eight shillings to redeem old Richard Vincett's clothes in 1741.⁽⁵⁾ Clothing, cooking pots, working tools, beds and other furniture were all redeemed from time to time and, by

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1. K.A.O. P 241/11/3
 2. K.A.O. P 371/12/2-3
 3. K.A.O. P 100/12/3
 4. K.A.O. P 241/11/1
 5. K.A.O. P 100/12/3

1745 pawnbrokers had become important in helping out the poor, young and old, between pay days or pension days, in sickness, or during spells of high food prices; or during any other cause that led to temporary financial stringency.⁽¹⁾

Inventories of the poor's goods for Kent are very sparse, but a case could be made out that sparseness of furnishings was as much a matter of tradition as abject poverty, the dwelling still being regarded as a place to work, sleep and eat; the idea of the home as a place of comfort, retreat from the world, and a place of entertainment not having yet percolated down through society, if it ever did to the really poor.

The only inventory that has survived in the sources is that of James Carr of Cowden, whose goods were listed by the overseers when he entered the workhouse in 1801, being then eighty years of age and a pensioner for several years. His possessions consisted only of a bed, two bedsteads, two blankets, a pair of sheets, a table, a case of shelves, a knife box, a salt box, a flat iron and a case of earthen ware.⁽²⁾ No value was placed on them when they were listed.

Poverty is the overwhelming impression conveyed by the inventory of one John Turner, shipwright, who died in Deptford in 1691. His goods were listed as;

1. B.A.Holderness. Pre-industrial English Economy and Society 1500 - 1750. London 1970. p 204

2. K.A.O. P 99/12/2

three old tables, three old stools, one old cupboard, two old beds, two old frying pans, pair fire irons, shovel, fork, old bellows, a trunk and a chest,

total value fourteen shillings. Turner was not a poor man. When he died, the Dockyard authorities owed him three quarter's of a year's wages, a total of £14.0.0. ⁽¹⁾

Similarly, Widow Driver of Mereworth, near Tonbridge, had a bed, a rug, two blankets, a steddle, a joined stool and a chest. Within the chest, however, were: seven pewter dishes, three pairs of sheets and other linen, including a dozen napkins, and her clothing, including a coat, giving her goods a total value of seven pounds and eighteen pence⁽²⁾, a far cry from the value of the goods of the parish pensioners. Her furnishings are also sparse.

Inventories from other parts of the country also show the same lack of domestic possessions, but are not necessarily indicative of great poverty.⁽³⁾

The old had as little in the way of clothing as they had in household goods. When Tonbridge parish contracted the poor in the workhouse out to William Parker and John Ashdowne for three years from 1766, the agreement specified

1. DRa/P:10/20

2. DRb/P.1/12

3. D.G.Hey. An English Rural Community. Myddle. Leicester 1974. p 166
Hampson. Poverty in Cambridge. op. cit. p 125
F.W.Steer. Cottage and Farm Industries of Mid Essex 1635 - 1749. Chichester 1969. p 153
J.S.Moore (ed). The Goods and Chattels of our Forefathers Chichester 1976. p 189, p 251

that the parish would supply each inmate with new clothing at the beginning, while the contractors were to re-clothe them, again with new clothing, at the termination in 1769. Men and boys would have a coat, jacket, waistcoat, hat and a pair of shoes, two shirts and two pairs of socks. Women and girls would have a gown, several caps, a waistcoat, pair of shoes, cloak, a kerchief, together with two petticoats, two shifts and two pairs of stockings.⁽¹⁾ Since the contractors were to replace everything after three years, it is evident that the clothing was expected to last that long. Provision seems to have been made for the more intimate garments to be regularly changed and washed, but it is not possible to judge if they had other clothing also to allow of periodic washing. Sir Francis Eden discussed what he considered to be a suitable wardrobe for the poor. It differed very little from that supplied to the Tonbridge inmates, but he felt it should be renewed every other year.⁽²⁾

This entire outfit could be purchased for around a pound sterling. Since the Tonbridge parish and the contractors paid sixty pounds to re-clothe sixty inmates, this must represent a discount price for bulk, anything from ten to twenty per cent below the normal retail price.⁽³⁾ Clothing was always an expensive item; garments were worn for a long time and were never thrown away, being passed

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1. Tonbridge and Malling Borough Archives. A 169
 2. Sir F. Eden. The State of the Poor. Three Vols. London 1966. p 19
 3. K.A.O. P 371/12/5

from person to person or bought second hand.⁽¹⁾ Out-pensioners seldom received a complete wardrobe at any one time, unless they had reached absolute destitution before they approached the parish as in the case of Old William Tanner, of Maidstone, who was found to be 'near naked' when visited by the overseer.⁽²⁾ Items of clothing had to last far more than three years. John Wynn, a Tonbridge pensioner, was re-clothed only once during the eight years of his pension life.⁽³⁾ This is not to say that he received no other clothing at all. These are only those articles credited to him by name. Ascertaining what the aged actually received from the parish, and from other sources, is almost impossible.

The case histories from Cranbrook parish suggest that some of the aged, though parish pensioners for many years, received little or no new, or even second hand, clothing. There are some references to the parish giving individuals new shirts and shifts, but the accounts for 1705 reveal that the parish purchased clothing for 'all the old people'.⁽⁴⁾ It may well be that clothes for the pensioners are hidden, like so much else, in large anonymous 'Bills' paid quarterly or at less frequent intervals.⁽⁵⁾ Many female pensioners earned small sums, spinning, knitting or making up garments

1. D.Davis. History of Shops and Shopping. London 1966. p 19

2. K.A.O. P 241/11/4

3. K.A.O. P 371/12/2

4. K.A.O. P 100/12/2

5. K.A.O. P 99/12/1

Cowden 1662. Paid for apparel £3.13.8

Paid for shoes and mending £1.8.6.

1710. Paid for clothes, 'as by bill appears'

for other pensioners. Since the parish had already noted its expenditure in one form, it might not be considered necessary to record it again as the cost of the completed garment.⁽¹⁾

The gentry were also very generous. In 1722, Cranbrook paid eighteen shillings for hire of horse and cart to fetch and deliver the "things given by the Earl of Thanet" that year. A horse and cart could be hired for sixpence a day in the parish at that time, so the sum spent must represent a considerable amount of clothing and other items given to the poor.⁽²⁾ But gifts of cast off clothing to poorer neighbours do not, in the normal way, become part of written records.

All the written evidence points to the fact that after workhouses were established in the parishes, gifts of clothing to out-pensioners became less generous. Case histories show the provision of outer garments to be less common, with a greater reliance on second hand goods and the accumulation of deceased's clothing into a 'workhouse stock' to be drawn on as and when necessary.⁽³⁾

The Vestry Minutes have survived for Tonbridge for the years 1764 to 1768 and while several pensioners were ordered to have a shirt or a shift during this period, no one had a coat, jacket, shoes, gown or cloak of new material. Edward Walter was given 'an old cloak' of Roger Strange's, widow Pinson had a pair of second hand shoes, and old Knight had a

1. K.A.O. P 371/12/2 (1709). Paid Widow Beecher for making a gown. 2s0d

2. K.A.O. P 100/12/3

3. K.A.O. P 371/8/8

shirt from the workhouse stock.⁽¹⁾ Out-pensioners thus appear to be treated in a poorer manner than inmates of workhouses. There is no clear answer to this question. There was never any stigma attached to the wearing of second hand clothes, since the poor of all ages could seldom afford new.⁽²⁾ Workhouse rules, which made attendance at Divine Service compulsory several times a week, would make decently clad inmates essential, if only as a source of self satisfaction to the parish officers and respect for the Church. But keeping clean and tidy and looking after their clothing were all part of the discipline of the workhouse system.⁽³⁾

The first part of this chapter has attempted to place the aged into what the parishes considered to be a suitable physical environment and life style. Very fragmentary local evidence has been filled out by reference to other relevant sources. The provision would seem to be the minimum consistent with the continuation of life, a shelter, warmth and clothing. These seem to have been improved by occasional gifts from other members of the community. Food will be considered in a later chapter.

A further integral part of this relief in kind was health care, as they slowly succumbed to the ravages of old age. Again this varied widely according to need, from simple assistance in dressing and undressing and helping into bed

1. K.A.O. P 371/8/8

2. Davis. op. cit. p 19

3. This is a question to be discussed in full in the chapter on the role of the workhouse in the treatment of the old.

to the provision of medicines and nursing care in sickness, the services of a physician or surgeon in more serious cases, and the final service that could be rendered, namely burial.

The next section will consider these matters in more detail.

MEDICAL AND NURSING CARE

Sooner or later, relief for the aged had to include measures for their physical and mental well being, whether these were for the care and treatment of specific diseases or for health care in general as the physical and mental powers waned. Though they provided 'watchers' every night and daily attendants for Ellin Sands, a senile pensioner in her seventies, Cowden parish was still unable to prevent her from burning herself to death while cooking her food in 1764.⁽¹⁾ Care in sickness and dementia became an integral part of the relief provisions and all the parishes took these responsibilities seriously.

In the seventeenth, and for most of the eighteenth centuries, the most commonly used kinds of medical therapy were self-treatment or treatment rendered by lay people. Qualified physicians were few and far between and women, regardless of social status, formed a large group of amateur healers who, on marriage, were expected to be able to treat the more common ailments of their families, their servants

1. K.A.O. P 99/12/2

and sometimes their friends. Medical information of a sort was widely disseminated throughout the population, and even shared by medical men, so that remedies overlapped. Both urban and rural areas, therefore, supported a host of healers; qualified and unqualified; learned and unlearned; some practising medicine full time, others in combination with a trade, a shop or with being a wife and mother. A few specialised in a particular condition, such as Widow Hollands of Cowden who was well known for curing 'looseness'⁽¹⁾, or as in Tonbridge parish in 1768 when they paid Gabriel Thompkins' wife five shillings for five bottles of 'stuff' to cure the rheumatism.⁽²⁾ Whether a parish consulted a learned physician, an apothecary or a local wise woman, there were likely to be many similarities in the treatment; mainly purges or emetics, blood letting, sweating, herbal or metallic medicines. Medical practice was a collection of medical recipes for specific ailments, a collection of lore handed down by word of mouth or in medical treatises. Despite the efforts of 'qualified' men to keep certain 'mysteries' secret, women routinely prepared and administered medicines, delivered babies, applied leeches, dressed wounds and within the domestic sphere they were the medical authorities.⁽³⁾

Parishes had, therefore, a fund of knowledge and experience upon which to draw in providing the necessary

1. K.A.O. P 99/12/2

2. K.A.O. P 371/12/5

3. L.M.Beier. 'Sufferers and Healers. Health Choices in Seventeenth Century England. Leicester Ph.D.(unpub) 1984

medical care for their aged. The fact that they turned more often to the local men and women to supply their needs was, of course, cheaper but not necessarily second best. Such full time physicians as there were, tended to congregate in the larger towns; they had a status to maintain and thus charged high fees for their time and journeys, their medicines, for their surgery and for subsequent dressing of wounds. When Wrotham parish required the services of a surgeon to set a pensioner's broken leg in 1686, they had to send to Tonbridge, ten miles away. His charge for the journey and setting alone was thirty shillings.⁽¹⁾ In normal circumstances, Wrotham relied on the capabilities and experience of the local apothecary, who would not only visit a patient and prescribe, but also sold the raw materials in his shop so that others could prepare and dispense.⁽²⁾ The poor of Wrotham could not avail themselves of the services of a qualified man until after the opening of the workhouse when, after advertising, the parish placed a Dr. Lake under contract to care for all the poor, both inside and outside the House, at forty pounds a year. With extra for surgery, midwifery and prescribing for small pox, it was now probably worthwhile for qualified physicians to take up practices in these rural parishes.⁽³⁾

Side by side, therefore, with the provision of medicine and surgery by qualified practitioners, the parishes relied

1. K.A.O. P 406/12/3
2. K.A.O. P 406/12/4
3. K.A.O. P 406/12/3-5

throughout the whole of our period on the traditional forms of medication provided by experienced women, or on families who, through generations, had handed down their recipes from mother to daughter or sometimes from father to son; successful herbal remedies valuable to all those who could not afford the fees of a qualified physician. One such family was the Tully family of Cowden. They were active in this field from the early seventeenth century, preparing and dispensing concoctions for their poor neighbours, and to parish paupers. Not only did they supply curative substances at prices that were reasonable and the poor, or the parish, could afford, but on occasion took sick pensioners into their own home for short periods of residential care. There is a reference in the Cowden accounts to two shillings and sixpence being paid for "carrying old William Stanford to Tully's" in July 1667, and a similar sum being paid to carry him home again in October.⁽¹⁾

Twenty years later, Mrs. Anne Tully received sixpence a week for lodging and attendance, together with two pounds and ten shillings for her medicines when treating Widow Woodman.⁽²⁾

It is clear from this example that the nursing of the aged sick cannot be divorced from their medical treatment, for in many cases both were performed by the same person. Nursing seems to have been in the hands of several groups of people; those who worked for the parish on a full time basis

1. K.A.O. P 99/12/1
2. K.A.O. P 99/12/1-2

becoming very experienced, who could and did assume responsible positions in the many epidemics of disease. A second group attended their neighbours or their parents for short periods, while a third acted as ancillaries, as watchers on the dying, or assistants to the full time nurses. Though nursing is so closely bound with the medical treatment of the old, and in the presence of the physician nurses would act according to his instructions, for ease of description and analysis they will be discussed separately beginning with nursing care.

NURSING CARE OF THE AGED

The earliest reference to a parish paying a person to nurse sick pensioners on a full time basis in our parishes occurs in the accounts for Maidstone for 1603, when Goodwife Rowe was paid twelve pence a week for nursing. Occasionally she was allowed payments for bread and other necessities, which suggest that she 'lived in' at times.⁽¹⁾ There is no way the social status of Goodwife Rowe can be determined, but many widows, who lost their husbands while young or in early middle age, took up nursing in one of its many forms as a means of survival. Nursing was not confined to women. They were not all amateurs and many of them, gaining widespread experience working in a parish possibly under the professional eye of a qualified physician, became professional themselves, their status being recognised with the title 'Nurse'.

1. K.A.O. P 241/12/1A

Already on the list of Maidstone pensioners in 1664 was Nurse Ann Jackson. Left a widow with a young daughter in 1640, her courtesy title of Nurse when she first received a pension at the age of 74 shows how she had kept both herself and her child during the twenty four years of widowhood. The parish acknowledged her services with a pension slightly higher than that of her contemporaries, having two shillings a week instead of one and sixpence.⁽¹⁾ Nursing as an occupation was, thus, just as intimately bound up with the philosophy of 'setting on work' as it is with the medical and nursing care of the aged. The parish was again making the best use of available personnel and in the most economic way.

Less demanding tasks for the sick were carried out by less well equipped individuals. Elizabeth Sprite of Cowden looked after several pensioners during the 1660's, noted in the accounts as for example: 'tending old Taprell twenty weeks at sixpence'⁽²⁾ and in 1704, Tonbridge parish paid Goody Pearce one pound, seven and six for nursing her mother and father for eleven weeks, both being parish pensioners.⁽³⁾ As late as 1779, when workhouses had been in existence for more than fifty years, and they had developed both resident medical and nursing services, parishes were still paying the poor to care for each other. Wrotham in that year paid a neighbour sixteen shillings for nursing

1. K.A.O. P 241/11/1
2. K.A.O. P 99/12/1
3. K.A.O. P 371/12/2

widow Farrant.⁽¹⁾ Tonbridge in 1776 paid Dame Walker and Dame Ashdowne five shillings and sixpence between them for looking after Widow Elizabeth Skinner in her last illness.⁽²⁾ Parishes did not employ many full time nurses for it was too expensive.

Nursing was also an occupation for men. Poor elderly men became regular attendants for other older, sick or handicapped pensioners. They had a specially useful role to play in the care of heavy and bedridden old men, where the women were not able to manage physically.

Timothy Croft, a Cowden pensioner in his nineties, was cared for by David Turner from 1731 to 1735, to be replaced by William Austen, who nursed Croft until his death at 99 years of age in 1740.⁽³⁾ By 1735, Turner was already being called 'old' by the overseers and had to be supported by casual relief until becoming a parish pensioner in 1738, dying himself in 1740.⁽⁴⁾ Nor was William Austen a young man, for when he became a parish pensioner in 1750, ten years after Croft's death, he was already 79.⁽⁵⁾ When John Wynn, a Tonbridge pensioner lodged with a Widow Wood for nine years, became bedridden, the parish paid Joseph Moyse five shillings a month for looking after him for the last two years of his life.

1. K.A.O. P 406/12/6

2. K.A.O. P 371/12/5

3. K.A.O. P 99/12/2

4. Ibid. and Cowden Transcripts P 99/28/4

5. K.A.O. P 371/12/2

MEDICAL CARE

Medicines were always a heavy charge on the parish purse. Until the middle of the eighteenth century, when contracting had become common and both physicians and apothecaries became more ready to practice in small towns and rural areas, their services were reserved for the treatment of special cases; surgery of all kinds, smallpox, the sick able-bodied and the mothers of young children, the two latter instances being guided as much by the economy of getting them back to work again as soon as possible, as by concern for their health. Tonbridge parish paid Dr. Amherst £6.5.0. as his fee for treating the Nevill family for small pox, which included two pensioner victims, in 1676. This amounted to a third of the total cost of medicines, nursing and burials for the whole parish for that year.⁽¹⁾ Yet the expenditure on these requirements only formed a very small part of total parish expense. The average annual expenditure on all forms of poor relief for Tonbridge has been calculated as £498.0.0 for the decade 1675 - 1685. Of this, only 8.6% was expended on doctors' bills, nursing care, burials and the control of epidemics.⁽²⁾ A century later, when the average annual poor law outgoings had reached £1,646.0.0., the amount spent on nursing care and ancillary services was only £18.0.0. (1.2%), to which must be added £42.0.0. (2.8%) to cover the doctor's salary.⁽³⁾ On the face of it this looks like a drastic cut in medical

1. K.A.O. P 371/12/1 (See appendix II)

2. Compiled from accounts, K.A.O. P 371/12/1-2

3. K.A.O. P 371/12/5-6 (1775 - 1785)

services to all sections of the poor, but it is certain that a considerable amount of such payments is concealed in the widely used terms 'Overseers expenses and reliefs and Bills'⁽¹⁾. From such case histories as have been prepared for out-pensioners for the late eighteenth century, and the doctors' accounts that have survived, the aged seem to be having better and more direct attention from physicians and surgeons after the introduction of the contract system.⁽²⁾

It seems fairly safe to conclude, therefore, that the old received little medication other than the traditional homely and herbal medicines in the early and late seventeenth century. After 1700, in the more populated parishes like Maidstone and Tonbridge, the benefits of professional care began to spread to the old. Widow Whitebread, a pensioner living in a Maidstone almshouse, was one such who received a number of visits and medicaments in 1702, between August and September at a cost of five pounds, including paregoric, smelling salts, purges, soporifics and other unrecognisable decoctions.⁽³⁾ The establishment of workhouses provided a great impetus to the expansion of medical services for the aged, both for those inside the institution and for those outside. Maidstone had a workhouse by 1720 and the appointment of a medical officer at a fixed annual salary meant that henceforth all the old and poor could be treated on a regular basis. Cranbrook followed in

1. K.A.O. P 1371/12/5-6 (1775 - 1785)
2. K.A.O. P 406/12/26; K.A.O. P 241/12/5-34
3. K.A.O. P 241/12/5

1722, Tonbridge in 1726 and Wrotham in 1729 with parish doctors.⁽¹⁾ Cowden, being so sparsely populated, did not adopt the practice until 1768.⁽²⁾

In addition to this stimulus given by the workhouse to the adoption of trained medical personnel to treat the old, they were in effect the only places available for the residential care of the old, except for pest houses, still reserved for small pox. Most parishes began to use them where the old required twenty-four hour care after injury or serious illness, making them temporary inmates. In March 1763, Old William Barton was admitted to the Wrotham workhouse with a broken leg. Old Isaac Berry went in for treatment of the itch and during the same month, Old William Stonham returned home to his lodgings after having been nursed for some weeks in sickness.⁽³⁾ A year later, in the same parish, the parish nurse applied to the Vestry for Old William Assiter to be admitted temporarily until he recovered from his sickness.⁽⁴⁾ Edward Longley, normally living with his son in a Cowden almshouse, was taken into the workhouse in 1769 to be returned to his home within a few weeks under the care of Jane Best, who remained his attendant until his death late in 1790.⁽⁵⁾ The workhouses

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1. These are the years in which the parishes opened their workhouses.
 2. K.A.O. P 99/12/18. In the agreement Cowden made with Joseph Bridgland in 1769, he agreed to care not only for the workhouse inmates and the poor living in the parish, but also for those living in adjacent parishes.
 3. K.A.O. P 406/12/28
 4. Ibid.
 5. K.A.O. P 99/12/2

also provided temporary shelter and nursing care for old 'wanderers' who became sick. This is particularly true of those parishes and towns where the through traffic of poor on foot was always a burden to the officers. Maidstone workhouse housed a 'poor old sick woman, who had lain all night in Mr. Edmond's wharf in thunder and rain', and gave her two shillings for her sustenance when she left several days later.⁽¹⁾ Many of these aged homeless reached the workhouses beyond help, the Governor of Wrotham workhouse, for example, noting in his report for 1738 that he had buried five old strangers that year.⁽²⁾

As the eighteenth century progressed, these early primitive attempts at residential care were expanded with the provision of more specialised facilities. Treatment of infectious diseases improved dramatically as physicians became more experienced. Improved diagnosis enabled small pox and typhus, the most dangerous infections, to be distinguished from measles and those of lesser infectivity. Parishes moved away from the concept of the old pest house and began to find places to treat special conditions.

Many old pensioners were sent to London hospitals for treatment, always an expensive process since admission involved expenses over and above the cost of treatment. To get one, William Baiss, into Guy's Hospital in 1726, the Maidstone officers had to apply by letter, accompanied by a recommendation from the parish doctor. The admission ticket

1. K.A.O. P 241/11/5

2. K.A.O. P 406/12/4

was countersigned by the Mayor and a Justice, both of whom put up the security for a bond guaranteeing that the parish would pay all expenses, including the funeral, which occurred a year later and cost £1.5.0.⁽¹⁾ After considerable effort and expense, including two personal visits before the hospital committee, Wrotham finally managed to get old Judith Hills, a spinster crippled with arthritis, into St. Luke's Hospital, London, for a year's treatment. This cost in all £14.15.9⁽²⁾ Every overseer's account book in West Kent could provide examples of elderly unfortunates who were sent to Bedlam for treatment,⁽³⁾ while a lucky few were recommended to have one or two weeks sea bathing.⁽⁴⁾

There was thus an enormous expansion in institutional care for the aged and the use of up-to-date facilities, but with it went the added expense, and because of this it is reasonable to assume that a lot more could have benefited but for the cost. Many suffered as a result, especially the mentally afflicted. The case of Ellin Sands of Cowden, who fell into the fire, has been mentioned.⁽⁵⁾ Maidstone paid for ironwork to keep old Woodger chained down in 1730,⁽⁶⁾ but in most of the instances, 'lunatics' were treated with more compassion, if with greater expense.

Plants and herbs remained the core of the physician's

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1. K.A.O. P 241/11/5-6
 2. K.A.O. P 406/12/30
 3. K.A.O. P 99/12/1-2; P 406/12/6
 4. K.A.O. P 241/11/6
 5. K.A.O. P 99/12/2
 6. K.A.O. P 241/11/5

materia medica throughout the period and feature prominently in such local bills and prescriptions as have survived. All those who dispensed medicines considered it essential to guard their professional secrets. This is just as true of 'wise women' and herbalists as it is of the medical practitioners. Whereas the former concealed their potions' constituents with such names as 'soothing balm' or 'stuff' to cure the itch, the latter resorted to vague terminology or Latin jargon, making identification and assessment of efficiency difficult. Bleeding, purging, the use of emetics, antipyretics and smelling salts were their stock in trade for the aged. 'Composing' or hypnotic draughts were given liberally at night and stimulating cordials during the day, the latter including wine and sherry in seemingly large quantities.⁽¹⁾ The combination of drastic methods such as regular bleeding and purging, combined with age and poor nutritional state and medicines of doubtful efficiency led to slow recovery, prolonged incapacity and frequent setbacks. Old John Climpson of Maidstone, for example, developed an eye infection in 1771. The physician began the treatment with a 'collinium' or plaster to the affected left eye on 8th June. After two weeks of this, the 'tumour' was incised, accompanied by bleeding to the back of the neck. Four months later the vouchers show Climpson still being treated with plasters, 'decoctions', pills and purges.⁽²⁾

1. K.A.O. P 241/12/4-12

2. K.A.O. P 241/11/15

Widow Macey, occupant of a Maidstone almshouse, dislocated her shoulder early in 1735. It had to be reduced not once but three times, leaving her greatly handicapped for many months. In this instance, the blame does not necessarily rest on inefficiency but probably on a combination of factors; old brittle bones, weak ligaments, poor healing powers and possibly the obstinacy of the old woman might all play a part.⁽¹⁾

Richard Smith, Maidstone pensioner, fell out of a tree at the age of 76, breaking his arm (1690). Despite surgery in setting the broken bones, he was never able to use the arm again and could no longer supplement his small pension.⁽²⁾

The examples quoted so far belong to the age old practices of bone setting and lancing, but practitioners were becoming more adventurous and undertaking some extensive and radical forms of surgery on pauper pensioners for high fees. (Surgery was always an extra for physicians under contract.) Maidstone paid £10.0.0. in 1700 for the cure and removal of a large 'mortification' from Widow Leppard's hip, from which she did not recover.⁽³⁾ Similarly, Wrotham paid Mr. Edward Walker four pounds in 1752 for curing Old Robert Berry of a fistula.⁽⁴⁾ Since the aged constituted such a small proportion of the population, it is not to be expected that overseers accounts would abound with

1. K.A.O. P 241/11/6
2. K.A.O. P 241/11/1-2
3. K.A.O. P 241/11/5
4. K.A.O. P 406/12/4

references such as the above, but there are sufficient available to conclude that treatment, whether medical or surgical, efficient or less so, was made available to them when it was necessary.

The biggest medical crisis that could face the parish officers was an epidemic of infectious disease. It was not uncommon for the late winter months, January to March, especially if severely cold, to be marked by outbreaks of pneumonic type infections, like influenza, bronchitis or pneumonia, which took a high toll on the old. The pension list of a parish could be halved in a matter of weeks. An outbreak of 'sickness' in 1688, caused the deaths of ten Maidstone pensioners in three weeks in February.⁽¹⁾ Maidstone, being an old overcrowded town, much prone to flooding was particularly affected by these winter outbreaks among the old. In 1673, in early January, the overseers noted over a hundred poor sick, some of whom were specifically stated to be suffering from the 'sweating sickness'. Twenty-six of these were pensioners, eight of whom were buried between January and March. ⁽²⁾

Other parishes suffered in the same way. Tonbridge buried ten pensioners in the early months of 1682,⁽³⁾ eight in 1708⁽⁴⁾ and fourteen in 1711⁽⁵⁾. Each winter, saw a rise in the mortality of the pensioners in Cranbrook, four

1. K.A.O. P 241/11/4 Burial Registers, All Saints Maidstone
2. K.A.O. P 241/11/1 Ibid.
3. K.A.O. P 371/12/1 TR. 1451/32 4 - 5
4. K.A.O. P 371/12/2 Ibid.
5. Ibid.

in 1673⁽¹⁾ and ten in 1695-1696.⁽²⁾ Cowden and Wrotham, being rural parishes, suffered less in this way since the pensioners were more scattered and less prone to be infected.

All increase in sickness and mortality severely stretched the resources of the parish but none more so than the frequent epidemics of smallpox and other related diseases such as typhus, which were not always differentiated but were all equally devastating. Resources in money, manpower, both to control the spread and to nurse the victims, were stretched to the limit. Even a small outbreak such as occurred in Wrotham in 1695 and involving fourteen patients only, led to a rise in expenditure from £127.0.0. in 1694 to £160.0.0.⁽³⁾

After the 1660's, smallpox replaced plague as the major scourge. The last great outbreak of plague in West Kent affected Maidstone between 1665 and 1668, with a mortality of over 400.⁽⁴⁾ During the period of ascendancy of smallpox, up to around 1700, the disease attacked all age groups but being less virulent than plague, more survived to acquire a lifelong immunity and reach old age. All epidemics taxed the skills and ingenuity of all the communities and it was soon realised that the very stringent precautions that had been necessary to prevent the spread of plague were not

1. K.A.O. P 100/12/1 TR/595/2-4

2. K.A.O. P 100/12/2 TR/595/2-4

3. K.A.O. P 406/12/3

4. Burial Registers. All Saints Church, Maidstone.

essential with smallpox. Thus victims could be safely isolated in their own homes, or in a pest house if there were several, and there need be no interference with normal social and economic intercourse. From the late seventeenth century onwards, there appeared among the older members of the communities, numbers of men and women who had survived smallpox and who could approach other victims in complete safety. Widow Sturt of Tonbridge, who had survived an epidemic in 1681, while her husband succumbed, took charge of the nursing in the pest house when members of fifteen different families were moved there in an outbreak of the disease in 1698-1699. She was assisted from time to time by others, young and old, who had survived the infection, while Nathaniel Wright, occasional parish pensioner, carried provisions and other requirements to and from the pest house.⁽¹⁾ There is no longer any mention of 'watchers', able-bodied men employed to guard all approaches to the pest houses containing plague victims. During the plague outbreaks in Wrotham and Maidstone in 1666, 1667 and 1668, so great was the fear of the plague that the parishes had to send out criers trying to persuade men to take on the task of watching, offering inducements such as good wages, liberal diet and plenty of tobacco.⁽²⁾

Soon parishes were confident enough to leave the victims in their own homes. When Goodman Humphrey and his

1. K.A.O. P 371/12/2

2. K.A.O. P 406/12/1; K.A.O. P 241/11/1

family developed smallpox in 1741, the Wrotham officers simply isolated them in their own cottage, sending in Old Widow Buss to nurse them, she being paid £6.18.0 for her services, while 'the old woman who fetched and carried' received several payments of twelve shillings.⁽¹⁾

Old Robert Franks and his wife Mary, again of Wrotham, both survived smallpox in 1751. Over the next fifteen years, both gave valuable service to victims of the disease. Mary nursed regularly in the pest house when it was occupied, assisted on occasions by her daughter-in-law. Robert fulfilled a complementary function in their cottage which was used, firstly as a place of quarantine for contacts of victims until they succumbed or were declared clear of risk; then as a place where convalescent patients could go through the period of 'airing'. This was a matter of several weeks, then believed to be necessary before it was safe to return the recovered patients to the community. Robert and Mary continued to work for the parish in this way until 1763 when they gave up and became regular pensioners, he then being 74 and she 70.⁽²⁾

These older men and women developed special skills in nursing smallpox and fulfilled a valuable role in the community. There are many other examples of quite old people who served their community in this way. Abraham Pronger of Hildenborough nursed smallpox victims in Tonbridge⁽³⁾, Widow

1. K.A.O. P 406/12/4
2. K.A.O. P 406/12/4-5
3. K.A.O. P 371/12/5

Elizabeth Franklin in Maidstone⁽¹⁾ and Widow Tolhurst in Cranbrook. The latter's contribution could be considered outstanding. Cranbrook was not only a garrison town in the Seven Years War but French prisoners in their thousands were lodged in Sissinghurst Castle. When smallpox broke out among the militia and the French prisoners, there were hundreds of victims. Widow Tolhurst, with her daughter-in-law as second in command, both widows, marshalled a body of women, young and old, to nurse these patients.⁽²⁾

Very little of a precise nature can be said about the care of the aged in sickness once they became inmates of the workhouse. The onset of illness and their obvious inability to care for themselves were often the signal for their removal. The institution did employ nurses, and medical treatment was always at hand, but details are henceforth lost, either in general payments or because not many workhouse records giving such details have survived. Their treatment would be no worse than that they received as out-pensioners, and many workhouses had a room set aside as an infirmary where they could receive continuous care. The role of the workhouse in the treatment of these aged paupers is a key question to be posed to the sources and will form the basis of a later chapter.

Hitherto little has been said about the money which these old people received from the parishes, though they

1. K.A.O. P 241/11/7
2. K.A.O. P 100/12/5-7d

have been called pensioners and some mention has been made of payments received for some forms of work. The next chapter will be devoted to an analysis of the pensions and 'setting on work'.

This chapter has concentrated on the ways in which the parishes made provision for the satisfaction of the multifarious physical needs of the aged. It becomes clear that the simple concept of 'relief', as envisaged by the law of 1601, had expanded into a whole network of services and provisions, similar in all the parishes, over the century and a half covered by this study.

Though the dependent old have been referred to as pensioners from time to time, and the pension was an important part of their relief, it has not yet been discussed. Neither has there been any consideration of the aged pauper's diet and the level of nutrition. Both these form the substance of separate chapters. Attention has already been given in Chapter I (pp 21/22) to the fact that this thesis presents the view that the aged had control over this dole of money, the pension, to provide their own diet, giving them limited scope for personal preference. It is, therefore, felt that nutrition and the analysis of the pensions would be best considered in this way.

Subsistence and nutritional standards form the basis of the next chapter while Chapter V is devoted to an analysis of the pensions, the ages at which they could be expected, the size and money obtainable from work, which would affect the size of the pension.

CHAPTER IV - SUBSISTENCE, COST OF LIVING AND NUTRITIONAL STANDARDS

Subsistence Levels

Much of this chapter is inevitably based on deduction and speculation, since there is very little real information available about the total intake of the old in weight terms of bread, cheese, butter, meat, tea or beer, which contemporaries, almost without exception, isolate as the staple diet of the poor in such printed diets and budgets as survive.⁽¹⁾

The same authorities, in their budgets, emphasise the inability of the old to survive without recourse to the parish for relief at times. Since the point has already been made earlier in this text that parishes would maintain their aged poor at a comparable standard to the poorest of labourers, the assumption is made here that this is the case.

Any social group living in great poverty, as did the parish pensioners, either with or without relief under the poor law, must at some time, given their vulnerability, have found themselves in actual want.⁽²⁾ From the body of evidence which has emerged about the treatment of the aged, it seems certain that those additional supportive

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1. Eden. op. cit. Vol II. p 226
Rev. D. Davis. The Case of the Labourers in Husbandry.
London 1797 p 121
 2. In the present context, subsistence is taken to mean the amount of food, of whatever quality and quantity, is sufficient to maintain life without obvious physical and functional decline, chiefly manifested as weight loss and increased susceptibility to infection.

services such as charities and gifts, or paid work, did not extend to each and all the old at crucial points. This supposition seems unavoidable since firstly, so few a proportion of the old became dependent on the parish that some must have been unprovided for, in modern terminology, had slipped through the net; and secondly, charitable donations were most uneven in their effects. It is more than probable that private individuals, both rich and not so rich, were providing some additional assistance of which some records have survived, and it may have been more extensive than generally believed. There may also have been some begging. In spite of these additional support systems, it seems reasonable to suppose that there would be those for whom work could not be found or who could not work to supplement their pensions, where little in the way of charity was available, who for long periods might find themselves having to depend for survival on their pensions alone. This chapter attempts to answer the crucial question whether survival was possible on the pension alone, or whether it led to a slow but steady period of increasing malnutrition.

It was a favourite occupation among tract writers on the poor laws in the eighteenth century to print diets and budgets, suitable for the poor, Sir Frederick Eden and the Rev. David Davis among them. Despite their good intentions, many of these diets have been examined under laboratory conditions by twentieth century nutritionists and have been found to underestimate grossly the real need of individuals

both in terms of food and in money to remain physically efficient.⁽¹⁾ Contemporary assessments of the needs of the old in order to survive are thus of no value, since no allowance has been made for the fact that the nutritional requirements of each individual are specific to that individual, being related to age, weight, sex, physical activity, dietary customs, state of health and a host of other variables. While the discussion in the chapter must necessarily be broad based, its aim is to throw light on the relationship between the size of the pension, its purchasing power and the resulting diet. Where possible some tentative conclusions will be put forward as to its adequacy.

Since relief in kind appears to have taken care of most of the other needs, however sparsely, the assumption is made here that all the cash resources reaching the pensioner, either as pension, earnings, donations from charity or casual gifts, could be spent on food. Neither will gifts of bread distributed at the church door be included, though it may be taken for granted that the number of such loaves to be received by the pensioner would have been taken into consideration by the annual Vestry in assessing the pension level. There is some support for this viewpoint in the fact that out of the fifteen hundred or so case histories that were derived from the local sources, food was distributed to the old only in special circumstances; in sickness,

1. Sir J. Drummond and A. Wilbraham. The Englishman's Food. Five Centuries of English Diet. Revised, D. Hollingsworth London 1957. pp 257 -258

to 'lunatics', presumably because they were unable to manage money, during very high bread prices, as bread charities or as single acts of kindness. Old John West of Wrotham received meat valued at nine shillings during many weeks of sickness in 1659⁽¹⁾, while a century later the same parish was still distributing meat in sickness to the old, old Thomas Terry and his wife, both aged 80, being recipients, with others, in 1758 and 1759.⁽²⁾

Old Henry Pattenden of Maidstone, sick for many months in 1733-1734, in addition to receiving an extra sixpence a week to pay for nursing attention, also had eight necks of mutton at various times.⁽³⁾

Meat was always deficient in the diet of the very poor, and the giving of meat during periods of illness indicates some awareness of the relationship between recovery and better food.

Those unfortunates designated 'lunatics' by the overseers often had their entire relief as a week's food. Widow Bunter of Cranbrook, invariably referred to as 'Crazy Bunter', was lodged with a Widow Sowton who received her lodger's rations each week.⁽⁴⁾ Elizabeth Skinner, maintained by the parish of Cowden for over fifty years, until her death aged seventy nine in 1694, was another similar pensioner.⁽⁵⁾ Ellin Sands of the same parish has been

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1. K.A.O. P 406/12/1
 2. K.A.O. P 406/12/5
 3. K.A.O. P 241/11/6
 4. K.A.O. P 100/12/3
 5. K.A.O. P 99/12/1

mentioned previously.⁽¹⁾

For the entire period under consideration, more than two thirds of the out pensioners in the West Kent parishes had parish pensions of about one shilling and sixpence a week, some slightly more and some slightly less. If the hypothesis is reasonable, these sums, either alone or in conjunction with sums received from other agencies, should have been sufficient to provide at least for survival when the price of bread was cheap or reasonable. From a consideration of wheat prices available for Maidstone market for most of the eighteenth century⁽²⁾ and from the legal prices for loaves according to the Assize of Bread⁽³⁾, bread would be cheap when wheat was sold at twenty to thirty shillings a quarter, and reasonable in price when wheat was priced at between thirty and forty shillings. Above this level, bread would be significantly affected, both in price, size and composition.

A quartern loaf of four pounds and four ounces could vary in price as shown in the table below. It refers to wheaten bread.

<u>Price of Quarter Wheat</u>	<u>Price of Loaf</u>
20 shillings	6d-7d
28 shillings	8d-9d
40 shillings	10-12d
80 shillings	20d. ⁽⁴⁾

1. K.A.O. P 99/12/2

2. K.A.O. Q/S0/W 7-11. Also Appendix III.

3. R. Burn. Justice of the Peace and Parish Officer.
London. 18th ed. (J. Burns) 1797. pp 278-279

4. Ibid.

It seems unlikely that a solitary pensioner could or would buy bread in such a large amount at any one time, since bread is not a good 'keeper'. Smaller loaves were readily available but controlled by the assize of bread. Bakers sold bread at a half penny, a penny, twopence and threepence and so on, this time varying the size with the price of wheat rather than in cost.⁽¹⁾ A penny wheaten loaf could thus vary in weight from four and a quarter ounces when wheat was eighty shillings, to twenty-two and a quarter ounces when the price was at its lowest; a considerable difference. When the price of wheaten bread (white bread) was high, pensioners would have to make their pensions go further by the use of standard bread which still retained a certain amount of bran and was thus about a third cheaper. In the towns it was quite common for the aged to mix their own dough and bake it in the embers of their own fires or take it to the local baker who would bake it with his own loaves for a small charge.⁽²⁾

It has been well established that throughout our period the diet of the poor was coarse and monotonous, consisting mainly of bread, a certain amount of cheese, butter and meat as and when they could be afforded. Ale was drunk whenever possible, home brewed by some, but with the rise in the price of fuel this became too expensive and was slowly replaced by tea.⁽³⁾ No pensioner could afford to buy tea,

1. K.A.O. Q/SO/W7-11

Burn. op. cit. P 278-279

2. M. Harrison. People and Shopping. London 1975. P 15

3. Everitt in Thirsk (ed) op. cit. P 576

which was still an expensive luxury. Used tea leaves were the perks of cooks in larger houses, who made a small profit by selling them to the poor at the back door, while the less affluent gave them as gifts to their poorer neighbours.⁽¹⁾ Sloe leaves and whitethorn leaves gathered from the hedges, dried and rubbed, made an infusion indistinguishable from tea, if somewhat bitter in taste.⁽²⁾

Vegetables in season, a little fruit, fish, offal or fat bacon, supplemented this diet. But as few small almshouses or urban cottages had plots of any size, it would be difficult to supplement the diet cheaply. Bread, in reasonable harvest years, was usually the cheapest of food, but it could rise in price beyond the ability of a pensioner to pay in times of dearth, if he or she continued to demand wheaten or standard bread. As such periods approached, the law allowed bakers to add permitted quantities of flour made from cheaper cereals such as oats, barley or rye, to keep the price within affordable limits.⁽³⁾ Though the price was kept down in this way, its composition and nutritional value could be drastically altered. The bread became unpalatable and even the very poor turned against it, except in mitigation of hunger. In crisis years, even alternative bread became beyond the pensioners' reach. Gilboy has estimated that after 1740 there was a slow but steady rise

1. M. Harrison. op. cit. p 75

2. F.W.Hackwood. *Good Cheer*. London 1911. p 78

3. 31 Geo. II c 29. (1710) Only in extremely rare conditions, as in 1795, was bread allowed to be made of alternative grains alone.
Burns. op. cit. p 281.

in the price of bread, unrelated to traditional harvest fluctuations, which meant that labourers had to spend at least forty per cent of their wages each week on bread.⁽¹⁾ As the price of bread rose, other foodstuffs were crowded out. For the old pensioner living on her eighteen pence a week, both her income and her demand for bread were inelastic. This compounds the difficulty of assessing the adequacy of a diet based on the pension alone. For example, in 1795, the greatest crisis year of the eighteenth century as regards food, the price of wheat reached a hundred and eight shillings a quarter in Cranbrook in August, and the price of second quality bread reached twenty pence for a quartern loaf; wheaten bread had been forbidden and a penny loaf of household bread weighed only five and a half ounces.⁽²⁾ Elsewhere in this chapter it has been calculated that an old woman required a pound of bread a day as a minimum for survival (page 138), with bread at this price she would need 20pence a week for bread alone. Starvation was the only consequence if the parish and the community did not step in with added assistance. Assistance was always available, though it cannot always be found in the records which have come down to posterity. There were regular parish 'feasts' for example, celebrating Saints' days, the seasons of the year, or special celebrations such as the King's birthday. Local farmers gave lavish harvest suppers, and all

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1. E.W.Gilboy. Wages in Eighteenth Century England. Cambridge (Mass) 1934. p 56-57 (See Table overleaf)
 2. The Kentish Register. Canterbury Vol. III Aug. 1795
K.A.O. Fa/Aa 37. Faversham Assize of Bread. Aug. 1795

Table 4.1

DECENNIAL AVERAGE PRICE OF ONE GALLON
WHEAT. MAIDSTONE. EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

YEAR	PRICE PER GALLON
1700 - 1709	6d.
1710 - 1719	6d.
1720 - 1729	6d.
1730 - 1739	5d.
1740 - 1749	5d.
1750 - 1759	6d.
1760 - 1769	7d.
1770 - 1779	8d.
1780 - 1789	8d.
1790 - 1799	1s. 2d.

Source E.W. Gilboy Wages in
 Eighteenth Century England

who had helped to bring the crop in, no matter how small the contribution, would expect to share in the festivities. This included those aged no longer able to work but who had shared in the good fortune of the farm in the past. Local landowners often made a practice of distributing food to tenants, to the old or to the parish poor. Henry Streatfield of Chiddingstone Castle gave a bullock annually, for example, to be slaughtered and divided between the poor of his own parish and Cowden.⁽¹⁾

Historians and economists, concerned with the standard of living of the poor, have often concentrated on the construction of price series and cost of living indices.⁽²⁾ These have proved to be of enormous value in comparing the prices of staple foods over intervals of time, and comparing these prices with known wage levels to project a cost of living index, and to assess possible changes as money values changed or personal expectations increase, and dietary habits altered.

All the price series and indices show the same general trends, all critical periods coincide, so that some general assumptions relating to the changing conditions experienced by the old, as a social group, can be put forward, and related to the purchasing power of the pension. Between 1650 and 1700, prices remained fairly stable until the last

1. K.A.O. P 99/12/2

2. There are several, the best known probably being Sir Wm. Beveridge. Prices and Wages in England. London 1965; E.H. Phelps-Brown & S. Hopkins. Seven Centuries of the Prices of Consumables compared with Builders Wage Rates in Economica. New Series. Vol. XXIII. No. 92 1956

decade when there was a sharp rise of about twenty five per cent, coinciding with a run of very poor harvests. Between 1690 and 1699, the price of a wheaten quartern loaf in Wrotham rose from five pence to sixpence halfpenny, while the weight of a penny loaf fell from fourteen and a half ounces to ten and three quarters.⁽¹⁾ The same trend is to be observed in Maidstone, where the quartern rose slightly higher than in Wrotham.⁽²⁾ The price inflation here can be gauged when the Assize of bread for Maidstone in 1540 placed the price of a quartern loaf at one and a half pence.⁽³⁾ The 1690's were a decade of extreme hardship for the old with the rigid pension structure; and starvation inevitable unless the parishes adopted urgent additional relief measures.

From 1700 to about 1765, a further long spell of good harvests kept prices down to reasonable levels, except for the occasional bad year. Bread became actually cheaper, for the first thirty to forty years of the century, than in the late seventeenth century. In Maidstone it remained at between fourpence and fivepence the quartern loaf⁽⁴⁾ and the penny wheaten at between fourteen and seventeen ounces⁽⁵⁾. It may be supposed that the need to spend less on bread would have resulted in a general improvement in the pensioners standard of nutrition. Evidence in support of

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1. K.A.O. P 406/12/2. Burns. op. cit. P 281
 2. K.A.O. Q/SO/W7
 3. Gilboy. op. cit. P 143
 4. K.A.O. P 241/12/34; K.A.O. Q/SO/W7-11
 5. Burns. op. cit. pp 278-279

this claim is impossible to find in the local records. The Phelps/Brown index shows a fall from 671 points in 1700 to 591 in 1710; a rise over the next decade to 663, followed by further falls to 608, 553, 599. After 1750, prices begin a long slow steady rise until 1790.⁽¹⁾

On this evidence it would be reasonable to suppose that the first half of the eighteenth century might be regarded as a favourable period for the aged. Wheat was cheaper than it had been for a century and a half, and all other foods were cheap and plentiful. Yet these first decades of the century coincide with the most active period of tract writing in favour of workhouses, the most active period of parliamentary debate, followed by legislation, and a rapid drive to get a workhouse in every parish and the wholesale removal of the old to help fill them.⁽²⁾

The last forty years of the eighteenth century experienced several catastrophic harvests, accompanied by the slow but steady price rise indicated by the index quoted above, until 1790. There then followed a decade of exceedingly sharp price rises, particularly in bread, with the century ending in near famine conditions, exacerbated by war, massive inflation and a great shortage of ready money.⁽³⁾ The quartern loaf rose steadily in price from fivepence to eightpence in 1794, when the severe winter and the poor harvest of 1795 resulted in a massive rise to

1. Phelps Brown and Hopkins. op. cit. p 306

2. J. Burnett. History of the Cost of Living. London 1961. p119

3. Ibid. pp 178-188

between twelve pence and fourteen pence. In August 1795, wheat was selling in Cranbrook and Canterbury by as much as twenty-five to forty shillings a quarter more than in Maidstone. This took the price of the quartern loaf to twenty pence for one week, about sixpence above the Maidstone price.⁽¹⁾ The penny loaf dropped to five ounces rising to about six and a half by January 1796.⁽²⁾ Bread was costing pensioners more than twice as much in 1795 as it did a year earlier. Again starvation was the inevitable outcome without the adoption of emergency procedures by the parishes. These will be discussed later in the chapter.

To return to price series and indices; apart from being used to make general comparisons and assumptions, as they have been used in the previous few paragraphs, they have certain disadvantages for use in a study such as this. Changes in the prices of basic foodstuffs, especially bread, took place from week to week. In years of crisis the price of the loaf could change from day to day, or in the case of loaves sold by a cash price, the weight could fluctuate from day to day.⁽³⁾ Such ups and downs were crucial for the old but are concealed in any series, based as these are on average prices. Gilboy's Decennial averages for the price of a half peck or one gallon of wheat for Maidstone, completely eliminates years of high prices.⁽⁴⁾ A gallon of wheat, equivalent to eight pounds, would be a week's supply for an

1. Kentish Register. op. cit. p 314. K.A.O. Fa/Aa. 37.1796

2. Burns. op. cit. p 279

3. K.A.O. Fa/Aa. 37. 1795

4. Gilboy. op. cit. p. 43 (See Table 4.1)

old pensioner, but the indices also conceal the price magnifications that occur as purchased quantities become smaller. Bread was bought by the pensioner in small quantities, partly because of its poor keeping qualities but also because many overseers tended to give the pension in several instalments since there was a perennial shortage of ready money. Maidstone, for example, paid out relief every two to three days.⁽¹⁾ This shortage of coin became more acute as the eighteenth century progressed until by 1770, it was incorporated into the poor law that overseers were to provide for the poor but it was left to their discretion whether to give them money or victuals, usually as wheat or flour.⁽²⁾

A pension could also buy more in some parts of West Kent than others. The prices in Maidstone market show some significant variations from those in Winchester or Windsor but they could vary quite markedly in the region itself. The harvests in the wet clay valleys of the Weald varied quite considerably in the same year from those of the drier slopes of the Downs, the moisture laden soils of the former being better able to withstand drought and less able to withstand wet summers.⁽³⁾ During the near famine conditions of 1795, there was a difference of fifteen shillings a quarter in the price of wheat between Cranbrook and Canterbury, a matter of ten miles, and making a difference of twopence halfpenny in the quartern loaf and an even greater price difference

1. K.A.O. P 241/11/7-12

2. Anon. Complete Parish Officer. London 1772. p 180

3. Jones. op. cit. p 57

between these two markets and that of Maidstone.⁽¹⁾ All these differences were local and temporary, but placed great strain on the aged. With little or no income reserves, the need to spend more on bread could seriously interfere with their ability to live from week to week. The long view implicit in price trends seems hardly relevant. Pensioners would seldom make price comparisons for a longer period than their own lifetimes, and the more potent impact was produced by harvest fluctuations not annual trends.

In 1745, with an average harvest, wheat sold for thirty six shillings a quarter in Maidstone.⁽²⁾ The table below indicates how this price was reflected over the following year for the price of a half bushel in Wrotham. This amount of grain, when converted into flour, would be sufficient for three to four weeks bread for a pensioner, whether made at home or carried to the baker for baking, who would add about sixpence in all for his services.

<u>DATE</u>	<u>PRICE (1/2 Bushel)</u>	
1746 January	2s 6d	
April	3s 6d	
August	4s 6d	
October	4s 6d	
1747 January	4s 9d	(3)

1. Kentish Register. op. cit. p 357

2. K.A.O. Q/SO/W12-13

3. K.A.O. P 406/12/7. Wrotham Workhouse Accounts. These prices are those of grain purchased in small quantities and not proportional costs of bulk purchase, which would be less.

The price of wheat rose in this manner in any year, rising to a peak in August when the current harvest was coming to an end and the next was being anticipated. Since the price continued to rise into January, it is a fair indication that the harvest of 1746 was less good than that of 1745. In terms of bread, and allowing sixpence to cover milling and baking, this amounts to a doubling of prices over a year, from five pence three farthings to eleven pence halfpenny for the quartern loaf.⁽¹⁾

As the analysis of pensions will indicate, overseers accounts show no flexibility in adjusting the level of the pensions to the price of bread. Since prices fluctuated so frequently, the Assize stating that it need only be maintained at any one price for a week⁽²⁾, the administration of any kind of pension scheme would become impossible if it was conditioned by price levels. Once the pension level was agreed for a particular individual, after taking all their circumstances into consideration, it was altered only annually as the pensioner became sick or increasingly frail. Temporary emergencies such as a sudden rise in the price of bread were met by other means, by the sale of wheat at subsidised prices, temporary doles, free loaves and so on. It would seem that just as employers had objections to raising the wages of labourers when prices were high, because they feared that they would not be able to lower them again when prices dropped, without provoking

1. Burns op. cit. Vol. II p 278-279

2. Ibid. p 286

a riot⁽¹⁾, so Vestries likewise kept pensions at a minimum that would sustain life when prices were reasonable and eased the pensioners lot when times were hard, with supplementary benefits.

During the years of reasonable harvests and cheap bread, it has been calculated that a pension of one shilling and six pence would provide a diet adequate enough to keep the pensioner alive. This compares roughly with estimates made by some contemporaries⁽²⁾ and better than those which have received most publicity in the history of the Old Poor Law.⁽³⁾

Elizabeth Buggs of Wrotham had a pension of one and six from 1750 until her death in 1759. For one week, because of illness, in March 1756 the parish supplied her with food instead. She received the following items, alongside which are the prices paid by the overseers.

Gallon (8lbs flour)	1s. 0d
1/2lb butter	3d
3/4lb cheese	3d

this totals precisely one and six.⁽⁴⁾ This provides a very miserable diet for a week, dry and monotonous. But Widow Buggs was only in her sixties and still doing part time nursing and attendance for both the parish and for private individuals in 1756. There is every possibility, therefore,

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1. D.E.Williams "Were 'Hungry' Rioters Really Hungry?" in Past and Present. No. 71 April 1973, pp 70-75
 2. P.Dunning. A Plain and Easy Method of Maintaining the Poor. London 1683 p 6
 3. Eden. op. cit. p226 (Vol II)
 4. K.A.O. P 406/12/5

that she could have supplemented this diet with extras from her own resources. Nevertheless, it will be demonstrated below that there is some evidence for believing that miserable though this diet is, it would provide the minimum calorific requirements for a person of her age and life style.

A more realistic diet has been found for much the same period in Cranbrook. Widow Bunter (Crazy Bunter) was lodged for some years with Widow Sowton. For one week in 1749, while both were sick, their week's supplies were taken to them. They are listed, with the prices, in the overseer's accounts.

11lb meat and bread	1s 3d
loaf	2d
1oz tea. 2lb sugar. 1oz snuff	9d
1/2lb candles. 1/2lb butter	5 3/4d
Beer 2d. Bread. Faggots (Wood)	1s 0d
1lb cheese. small beer	7 1/2d

The list covers food, drink, heating, lighting and a little 'comfort'. The prices are those given by the overseers.⁽¹⁾

This diet for two people costs four shillings and three pence farthing. As both widows were old and sick, and the parish might have been a little more generous than usual, the removal of the candles, beer and snuff, would bring the cost very close to the average pension of one shilling and sixpence. In normal times both widows received a shilling a

1. K.A.O. P 100/12/5

week each, and had their rent paid.⁽¹⁾

Twentieth century nutritionists who are interested in such early diets are able to measure with great accuracy their nutritional value and adequacy. Using laboratory techniques and average quality modern foodstuffs, it has been estimated that a seventeenth or eighteenth century labourer, doing a moderately hard day's work, required between 3500 and 4000 kilocalories (kcal) daily to perform his work efficiently and to be able to maintain it day after day with only the addition of small quantities of meat for protein, vegetables and fruit to provide vitamins and minerals to keep him healthy.⁽²⁾ They have further estimated that 3100 kcal would be provided by a daily diet of:

2lbs wheaten bread

4ozs cheese

1 quart beer

The remaining calories could be made up by small quantities of garden produce, or meat. This latter could come from a garden, a home reared pig, poultry, eggs, fish or even a trapped rabbit.⁽³⁾

Elderly or old men doing light or occasional work needed about two thirds of the food intake of the working man, while an elderly woman required about half. From this it can be deduced that male parish pensioners ought to have been getting a pound and a half of bread daily and females

1. K.A.O. P 100/12/5

2. Drummond and Wilbraham. op. cit. p 257

3. Ibid. p 256

one pound. A gallon of wheat such as was provided to Widow Buggs of Wrotham would make eight one pound loaves. Using Thorold Rogers' prices as guidelines, these diets would cost the average pensioner between three pence and three pence halfpenny a day when the harvest was good to average.⁽¹⁾ Calculating the cost of a subsistence diet by this means suggest that the pension was seldom sufficient to cover all the calorific needs of the individual, and extra resources would be necessary to cover all needs, the charity loaf for example, or money earned, or begging at the back door of inns and taverns.

Many well meaning reformers of the period did the poor a great disservice with their model budgets and diets. They all, without exception, underestimated the calorific need which is wholly independent of the type of food eaten⁽²⁾ The following two budgets, one from the 1690's and one from the 1790's are both said to be 'typical' diets and weekly expenditure on food by a labourer.

1690	Cost(pence)	1797	Cost(pence)
Bread or corn	3 1/2	Bread	4 1/4
Butter, cheese, milk	2	Butter	1 3/4
Beer, ale	5	Cheese	1 1/2
Meat	1 3/4	Tea (4czs)	9
Roots	1	Sugar	1 3/4

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1. Thorold Rogers. History of Agriculture and Prices in England. London 1866 - 1902 Vol. VI p 454
 2. The usage of the terms calorie, kilocalorie, calorific requirements etc. has become so familiar that no definition of the terms has been considered necessary.

Fish, eggs	1 1/4	Bacon	1
Salt etc.	1	Oatmeal	1
Liquor	1		
Total	1s 5 1/2d	Total	1s 8 1/2d
Daily cost	2 1/2d (approx) ⁽¹⁾	Daily cost	3d ⁽²⁾

While the diet of 1797 clearly costs more for less, indicating a steep rise in prices over a century and a deterioration in the standard of living, even if the diets are acceptable, both are decidedly untypical. Both were produced during decades which saw several poor harvests, when prices were exceptionally high and the poor were suffering. In the 1690's, a quartern loaf sold in West Kent for between six pence and nine pence⁽³⁾, and an old man would require at least two a week⁽⁴⁾ making his expenditure on bread alone to a shilling or one and six, if he had to pay for it all. A weekly expenditure of three pence halfpenny for a man in work is ludicrous. Similarly in 1797, the same sized loaf sold for between a shilling and fourteen pence⁽⁵⁾. Four pence halfpenny would only keep an aged woman in bread for three to four days.

A fair amount of time has been spent analysing dietary requirements of the old and comparing their real needs with the suggestions put forward by two influential writers on the treatment of the poor who were separated by a century.

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1. G. King. Observations, Natural and Political, upon the state and Condition of England. London 1688 - 1690. p 67
 2. Eden. op. cit. Vol. II p 496
 3. K.A.O. P 100/12/2, K.A.O. P 406/12/3
 4. Drummond and Wilbraham. op. cit. p 257-258
 5. K.A.O. P 406/12/17. Wrotham Workhouse Accounts.

While their diets have been shown to have been quite unrealistic, and would lead to rapid malnutrition, the influence of their ideas on the formulation of policy cannot be underestimated. Both were published at times of severe dearth when the costs of poor relief were soaring, and both decades saw the gestation of movements for reform of the Poor Law system with consequent effects on the treatment of the old.

It was stated earlier in this chapter that the parish officers seemed unwilling to adapt the pensions to changes in the price of bread (page 135). There were several periods during the century and a half covered by this study when wheat prices were abnormally high, and any temporary rises in pensions should be fairly easy to discover. The most critical years were 1695-1699, 1707-1710, 1740-1741 and 1795-1800.⁽¹⁾ Since four of the five parishes under scrutiny had a workhouse by 1730, evidence about individual pensions for the time after this date is likely to be sparse. The aged, being one of the 'harvest sensitive groups'⁽²⁾ would be among the first to suffer from the effects of dearth, being already physically weak and probably malnourished, chiefly due to the effects of old age on appetite and digestion. One harvest crisis could be survived at the risk of further deterioration, to be manifested the following year as lowered resistance to infection and increased

1. K.A.O. Q/SO/W12-13

2. J.D.Chambers. Population, Economy and Society in Pre Industrial England. London 1972. pp 30-31

mortality from respiratory or other infections.⁽¹⁾

Several pensioners have pension lives which straddle the 1690's and 1790's. These two decades will be looked at more closely to see how the parishes responded to the needs of the old during periods of extreme crisis. Elizabeth Tully, widow, of Cowden became a pensioner in 1688, receiving only sixpence weekly, at which level it remained until her death in 1697. By analogy with other pensioners it is likely that this was to cover her rent while she earned her keep by nursing attendance and dispensing herbal medicines.⁽²⁾ Cowden was clearly disbursing an increased amount of relief during this decade for the accounts show a rise from £29.6.4 in 1690 to £49.8.11 in 1699.⁽³⁾ Between 1692 and 1697, the years of most acute shortage, several widows were given extra relief each year 'by consent of the parish', but as there are no names, Widow Tully cannot positively be identified. Distributions of wheat and flour were also being made each winter to those in want, but again she cannot be recognised. From 1697 onwards, doles of wheat and flour, sometimes rice and potatoes, were made regularly to the poor during the winter months right up until 1800.⁽⁴⁾ It would seem that Cowden made the conscious decision to give any additional assistance in the form of food when it was needed, rather than raise pensions or give

1. Wrigley and Schofield. Pop. Hist. op. cit. pp 305-312

2. K.A.O. P 99/12/1

3. Ibid.

4. K.A.O. P 99/12/1-2

doles of money.⁽¹⁾

Charles Wyborn and his wife had a joint pension of four shillings a week from Wrotham parish until his death in 1689, aged seventy-nine. His widow's relief was immediately cut to one and six, and remained at the same level until 1698 when she died aged seventy-five. She was noted in the overseers' accounts for the whole of these nine years as being 'sick', but apart from the usual rent and fuel, received nothing extra, except in 1692 when the parish, being a few pounds in credit, included her among a list of those given a bonus of six shillings as being 'deserving'.⁽²⁾ Wrotham was, however, a parish which tended to pay all bills incurred for poor relief in bulk, so that her additional relief could be concealed. To survive her husband for nine years, as a designated sick woman, surely implies access to resources in addition to her pension of one and six a week.

Thomas Brickenden, also of Wrotham, died in 1691, leaving a widow and a handicapped daughter in her twenties. Their joint pension, then a shilling a week, was slowly increased to become one and six by 1693. From this year the mother was noted in each entry as being sick, and regular increases on the grounds of sickness were made annually until by 1700 the joint pensions had reached ten shillings a month. It is always difficult to pin-point what is meant by sickness in the accounts. In this instance it could be old

1. K.A.O. P 99/12/1-2

2. K.A.O. P 406/12/2

age; she was over seventy and caring for a daughter, handicapped from some unknown cause. It could also be the effect of high prices on her standard of nutrition.⁽¹⁾

As with Cowden, the Wrotham disbursements show a marked rise in the 1690's over the 1680's, rising from a yearly average of around £100.0.0. to £142.0.0.⁽²⁾ From 1694 onwards there was a considerable rise in the amount of casual relief, but the custom of paying for everything once a year makes it impossible to identify purchases of extra wheat⁽³⁾ or what extras were received by individuals.

Wrotham was possessed of few charities, but parish officers occasionally made collections from door to door for the benefit of the poor, so it is possible this money was used to give gifts of bread, wheat, or money, or used to purchase grain or flour to be sold at reduced prices. This was the method adopted during the dearth of 1709-1710, the price of the flour being assessed according to the situation of the recipient. Widow Smith, pensioner, paid threepence a gallon less than Robert Farr, also a pensioner, who in turn paid threepence a gallon less than his son. Widow Smith was thus getting at least sixpence a gallon off the price of flour.⁽⁴⁾

Neither Cowden nor Wrotham can be said to have been greatly affected at this time. Being rural, sparsely populated, parishes the actual number of pensioners was

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1. K.A.O. P 406/12/2-3
 2. K.A.O. P 406/12/3
 3. K.A.O. P 406/12/3-4
 4. K.A.O. P 406/12/4

always small. Between 1695 and 1699, the worst years of crisis, there were only seven pensioners in Wrotham, with the numbers unchanged in 1709-1710.⁽¹⁾ In Cowden for the same years, pensioners numbered four and one.⁽²⁾ Neither parish was thus faced with a big problem.

The effects of dearth were always greater in the towns where people depended more on shops and markets. In Maidstone, the average annual disbursement for the 1690's was £736.5.0. a rise of more than forty per cent over that for the previous decade, namely £505.0.0.⁽³⁾ Cranbrook showed the same tendency, though the extensive poverty always present in that parish put drastic rises of poor relief even in crisis years out of the question. The parish accounts here show an increase from a yearly average of £300 in the 1680's to £376 in the 1690's, a rise of 25%.⁽⁴⁾

Expenditure in Tonbridge increased from about £500 to about £650, a rise of 30%.⁽⁵⁾

While they may not have increased the monetary value of pensions, all parishes counteracted the effect of the high prices on their pensioners' living standards in their own traditional ways: by collections, selling grain at subsidised prices or increasing the amount of bread distributed free at the church door.⁽⁶⁾

1. K.A.O. P 406/12/4

2. K.A.O. P 99/12/1

3. K.A.O. P 241/11/2-4

4. K.A.O. P 100/12/2

5. K.A.O. P 371/12/2

6. K.A.O. P 241/25/14,15. Maidstone Bread Book.

Any attempt to compare the practices of the 1690's with those of the 1790's is likely to be unsatisfactory. Much of the evidence for the latter decade is sparse because of deteriorating standards of accounting. Many of the aged were in workhouses, where bread prices no longer affected them. The practice of naming pensioners individually had almost disappeared, being subsumed under 'Weekly Pays'. Parishes were overburdened with large payments to mothers of bastards, to low waged able-bodied labourers and their families, while the workhouses, having failed to become self-sufficient, were proving to be an enormous cost.⁽¹⁾ Among all these changes, the pensioners are almost lost, but sufficient detail remains to show that fundamentally the system had not altered. Examples are few.

Old William Piggott, and his wife Eliza, became pensioners of Cowden in 1793, when both were seventy-three years old. They received four shillings a week jointly. In 1795 this pension was cut to two shillings and sixpence for one year, then returned to its former level. In 1801 it was raised by a further shilling. He died in 1803, aged eighty-one; she in 1805 aged eighty-five.⁽²⁾ In 1795, the year of their pension cut, the price of a four pound loaf had risen to fourteen pence in West Kent.⁽³⁾ It is reasonable to assume that in 1795, a year of crisis, the parish was giving

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1. See Appendix 6.1. Table of Costs of Running Tonbridge Workhouse.
 2. K.A.O. P 99/12/2; P 99/28/4 Cowden Burial Registers.
 3. K.A.O. Fa/Aa/37-38. K.A.O. P 406/12/17d Wrotham Workhouse Accounts.

pensions partly in cash and partly in food as they were legally permitted to do.⁽¹⁾ According to the overseers' accounts, the parish was also buying and distributing, probably in lieu of money doles, large amounts of flour, rice and potatoes.⁽²⁾

Only one named pensioner has been found for Cranbrook for the whole of the 1790's.⁽³⁾ This is not to say that they were all in the workhouse, since it is known from other sources that of the eighty to a hundred inmates in the Cranbrook workhouse, the usual number of old men and women seldom exceeded thirty.⁽⁴⁾

The Cranbrook rate books show some dwellings being occupied by the old, but since their relief has been lost among the weekly pay outs, their relief cannot be isolated for separate study. Widow Chainey received a pension of one and six from 1794 until her death in 1799, aged seventy-nine.⁽⁵⁾ It has been established that a pension of this level would provide a subsistence diet when bread was cheap or reasonable. But bread was not reasonable in price in the 1790's. It never fell below tenpence for the quartern loaf, and went to unprecedented levels in Cranbrook in 1795. In 1795, she could not possibly have survived on her pension without extra help. It is known that she was sharing in the

1. Anon. Parish Officer. op. cit. p 180

2. K.A.O. P 99/12/2

3. K.A.O. P 100/12/7

4. See also Report of Select Committee on Poor Laws 1818 p 163 on Cranbrook W/H. Farmhouse/Workhouse: housed when full, 100 young and old. Usual number of inmates 80-90 of whom 22 are children, 20-30 are old men and women.

5. K.A.O. P 100/12/7

parish's distribution of free wheat.⁽¹⁾ She may also have been buying it at a reduced price, since the accounts show a payment of £328 in 1799, being the 'balance of the sum due to him for wheat supplied for sale to the poor at reduced prices'.⁽²⁾

Pensions appear to have been abandoned by name in Maidstone, Tonbridge and Wrotham by the 1790's. Monetary doles had ceased to be given regularly at weekly or monthly intervals. They were, instead, being given at irregular intervals of two to three days as 'hand outs'.⁽³⁾ Whether this means that the Old Poor Law system had broken down in all three parishes, as it had in Maidstone, is not clear. It appears more likely that with the soaring price of food, distribution of food had become more important than money and the latter was being kept to a minimum. Wheat, flour, rice, potatoes were being distributed in all three parishes regularly, sometimes free, sometimes at reduced prices. The one obvious factor is that the costs of poor relief were mounting at an alarming rate. Disbursements for Tonbridge rose from £2,218 in 1790 to £5,706 in 1799,⁽⁴⁾ eighty per cent above those for the previous decade.

There are gaps of several years in the Wrotham records for this period, but the trend is the same. The outgoings

1. K.A.O. P 100/12/7

2. Ibid.

3. K.A.O. P 371/12/6-7; P 241/11/7; P 406/12/7

A practice called 'a great evil' in Report No. VIII by Assistant Commissioner Mr. Ashurst Majendie, on Kent, East Surrey and East Sussex (1832) (Poor Law Commission)

4. K.A.O. P 371/12/6-7

for 1781-1782 amount to £979.0.0. When the accounts recommence in 1796, they have reached £1,545.0.0. In twelve months' time they have reached £2,081.0.0.⁽¹⁾ Like the others it is expending enormous sums in relief as wheat, bread and potatoes. The aged were getting a somewhat more generous pension there than elsewhere, two shillings as against one and six per week, but it is given as casual relief at intervals of a few days.⁽²⁾

From the rather scattered evidence which is available to examination for these two decades, the 1690's and the 1790's, it is apparent that no parish raised the pensions in line with price rises. They were all, nevertheless, making strenuous efforts to alleviate the distress that would be inevitable to the aged otherwise. These have to be regarded as outstanding efforts to prevent actual hunger and starvation since it has already been established that the pension would only provide a subsistence when wheat prices were average or cheap.⁽³⁾ It is illuminating to compare briefly how the situation of the aged altered and the responses of the parishes to these two decades of dearth and alarming increases in poor law expenditure.

The first sixty years of the eighteenth century were, except for odd years, a period of plentiful harvests with wheat well below forty shillings a quarter on average.⁽⁴⁾

1. K.A.O. P 406/12/7

2. Ibid.

3. See page

4. Maidstone Market Wheat Prices. K.A.O. Q/SO/W6-11.
Appendix III

It reached this price only fourteen times in sixty five years. The standard of living of labourers is said to have improved during this time because of the rise in real wages.⁽¹⁾ This improvement does not seem to have spread downwards to the very poorest, the very old. In 1720, the price of wheat in Maidstone market fell to twenty shillings, the lowest price of the whole century, but in that year alone, one thousand and forty threepenny loaves were distributed at the church door, the highest annual distribution up to that time.⁽²⁾ Pensions were being reduced. Widow Twist had a reduction from one and six to a shilling in 1716. There is a gap of two years in her history from 1720 until 1722. It may be conjectured that she was swept into the workhouse with many others in August 1720, only to leave it two years later. She lived out the remaining four years of her life sick, lame and often in want, but never in receipt of a pension. She survived on hand-outs from the overseers at intervals of a few days.⁽³⁾

None of the so-called working class prosperity was being passed on to the pensioners. Low prices were being made the reason to reduce pensions, and shortly to force them into the workhouse. The parishes indulged in a steady process of tightening up expenditure on the old in all aspects. Tonbridge, which in the late seventeenth century had a programme of re-clothing its pensioners regularly, now

1. E.W.Gilboy. op. cit. pp 10-13; p 56

2. K.A.O. P 241/25/14-15. Bread Book

3. K.A.O. P 241/11/5

became less generous, old Thomas Rumens, for instance, receiving nothing in the way of apparel costing the Vestry any money between 1708 and his death in 1713.⁽¹⁾ Rents also rose in Tonbridge in this first quarter of the eighteenth century by an average of twenty five per cent, a considerable increase in expense for the parish when in 1708 it paid the rents of sixty four of its poor.⁽²⁾ The overseers' accounts of all five parishes give the impression of strenuous efforts being made to bring down poor law expenditure to the levels of the 1680's while the living was cheap.

The tightening up of relief during this time is often attributed to the Acts of 1692 and 1697, which demanded an annual review of the pension lists, reduction in the numbers of pensioners from regular to casual relief, and the introduction of badging as a safeguard against unentitled relief.⁽³⁾ At the same time, parishes were under growing pressure from advocates of the workhouse to convert to this system as being cheaper and more efficient. Poor relief was undoubtedly growing inexorably, and cheaper ways of handling the problem were inevitable.

There is insufficient evidence to make any real assessment of the cut-backs of the aged pensioners and whether they constituted the increased severity of attitude

1. K.A.O. P 371/12/3

2. Ibid.

3. 3 William and Mary c.11(1692); 8 & 9 William III c 30 (1697)

which has been said to have originated around this time.⁽¹⁾ It may be said with some certainty that there was a great deal of hardship among the old, since details about individuals emerging from the accounts contained references which can be translated only as a state close to destitution. John Martin, of Tonbridge, was said to be 'very old and helpless and poor' when he first received his relief in 1710.⁽²⁾ Goodman Abraham Beard and Old Thomas Cockle were both said to be 'sick and in want' by the Maidstone overseers before receiving a pension in 1712.⁽³⁾ Old Thomas How of Cranbrook was 'in want at several times' in 1728, 1729 and 1730 but though well on in his seventies, he received relief only at odd times. He died within a few weeks of being admitted to the workhouse in 1731.⁽⁴⁾ Treatment was less stringent in Cowden and Wrotham, the two rural parishes, which may point to the fact that in the towns at least, the old had to be in a state of extreme want before they received regular relief. It is difficult to reconcile the increased deterioration in the standard of living of the old with the generally accepted belief that the first decades of the eighteenth century saw an easing in the lot of the labourers. Gilboy saw little evidence of a rise in the standard of living.⁽⁵⁾ The presence of a workhouse would have affected the attitudes in no small

1. S. & B. Webb. op. cit. pp 103-105, 116-121, 151-155
2. K.A.O. 1P 371/12/3
3. K.A.O. P 241/11/4
4. K.A.O. P 100/12/4
5. Gilboy. op. cit. p 119

small measure at this time.

Despite strong efforts to tighten up on expenditure, and to force their children to support the aged, once the initial enthusiasm for workhouses subsided, most parishes continued to support the aged to the best of their ability throughout the eighteenth century. Tonbridge made a distribution of mutton to all 'old and poor people' in 1757⁽¹⁾. Flour was distributed free to the old during 'sickness' in Cowden in 1779⁽²⁾. The basic practices in each parish continued, and were reinforced during crisis times by local philanthropists.

Unlike the institutionalised support, private giving was spontaneous and unrecorded, so evidence is sparse. It was there, nevertheless, becoming 'newsworthy' when the poor faced crises. The most outstanding piece of evidence for private benevolence comes from Maidstone. In January 1795, after a most severe winter, 3000 of the poorest inhabitants were supplied with flour at a nominal price through the generosity of a number of the prominent citizens. Lord Romney, also a resident of Maidstone, provided fifty tons of coal at his own expense, to be given free to the most needy. The Rev. Charles Style gave a hundred stone of beef, while a few miles away in Mereworth, Lord le Despenser was distributing a hundred and fifty stone to his tenants and the villagers.⁽³⁾

1. K.A.O. P 371/12/4

2. K.A.O. P 99/12/2

3. Kentish Register. op. cit. Jan 1795. pp 34-35

This is a continuation of the paternalistic traditions of the landed aristocracy. The few lists of recipients that have come down through time show that some, if not all, the old were always present.⁽¹⁾

1. K.A.O. P 371/12/6; P 99/12/2

SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRICES,
STANDARDS OF NUTRITION AND MORTALITY IN THE OLD.

Throughout history, the relationship between famine, pestilence and the associated mortality has been recognised, if not fully understood. The interaction between less drastic degrees of malnutrition and increased mortality, where the links are more tenuous, has taken longer to appreciate. Twentieth century clinical observations into third world regions, of widespread malnutrition following disasters which have drastically affected the distribution of food, have often also caused a breakdown in personal and environmental hygiene. These provide further evidence supporting the relationship.⁽¹⁾ From clinical observation and experimental tests in industrial countries, there is also strong evidence that old age of itself produces lowered resistance to infection, irrespective of any other cause.⁽²⁾

It might be expected, therefore, that years of sustained high prices such as were experienced in the 1690's and 1790's, would have produced some evidence of such a demographic connection in the old with whom this study is concerned.

Many demographers have shown that variations in prices over a period of time are followed by variations in mortality.⁽³⁾ The major effect is produced, not in the year

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1. N. Scrimshaw, C. Taylor, J. Gordon. Interactions of Nutrition and Infection. World Health Organisation. Monograph 57. Geneva 1968. pp 9-11
 2. Ibid. pp 191-192
 3. Wrigley and Schofield. Pop. Hist. pp 372-373

of high prices, but in the two subsequent years, culminating in a peak at about sixteen months following the worst period of dearth.⁽¹⁾ To a casual observer the two events thus appear unrelated.

This suggests a pattern of events somewhat as follows. High prices and a lowered food intake, or a diet of much poorer nutritional value, leads to a gradual decline in the standard of nourishment in everybody. There are some sections of the community on whom the effects are quicker and more drastic. These are the very young and the old. When financial reserves and external agencies fail to make up the deficit, the individual is forced to draw upon bodily reserves of food to maintain organ function. When this functional weakness continues for any length of time, vulnerability to any prevalent infection is greatly increased. As far as the aged are concerned, this process is most severe in the winter months when respiratory infections to which they are most prone are at their most virulent. The response would depend on how close the aged were to the margin of subsistence before the onset of the crisis. In any case, the maximum effect would be to advance the date of burial by a year or two at most.⁽²⁾

This explanation is not wholly satisfactory, since it confines itself to dietary deficiencies and does not take into account other variables. Exceptionally cold winters

1. Wrigley and Schofield. Pop. Hist. pp 372-373

2. Chambers. op. cit. pp 30-32

also produce an increase in mortality in the old in the subsequent three to four months. All very cold winters will result in the death of some old from pneumonia, bronchitis or influenza, hypothermia, though these causes may not be identified in records.⁽¹⁾ The years 1693-1699, for example, were years of scarcity, wet summers and severe winters. The calling in of debased coinage in 1696 exacerbated the distress of the very poor.⁽²⁾ All these factors contributed in some measure to the increase of sickness among the old in West Kent and to the increase in the number of burials.

Wrigley and Schofield have put forward the view that even in years of exceptionally high prices, such as only occurred a few times in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the national mortality was raised by only nineteen per cent, spread over three years.⁽³⁾ This was then compensated for in the following year or two by an unusually low mortality. It should be possible to test these assumptions, to see how far they are borne out on a regional level. Such an attempt has been made and the results are displayed in the table overleaf. Some distortion of the results is inevitable because of the defective sources.

Though these figures are concerned only with the mortality of the old and they would have soon died in any case, the rise of burials in the second decade is unmistakable, with the exception of Cranbrook. The

1. Wrigley and Schofield. *op. cit.* pp 372-373

2. Sir C. Creighton. History of Epidemics. London. Two Vols. 1894. Vol. II p 445

3. Wrigley and Schofield. *op. cit.* pp 372-373

Table 4.2

BURIALS OF AGED OVER THREE DECADES

DECADE	COWDEN	CRANBROOK	MAIDSTONE	TONBRIDGE	WROTHAM	TOTAL
1681 - 1690	2	48	50	18	9	127
1691 - 1700	7	48	56	26	10	147
% rise	250	0	12	44	11	15
1701 - 1710	2	34*	40	17	17**	110
% fall on 1681 - 1690	0.0	29.0	5.0	5.5	-	16

Notes: * missing pages in Register
 ** figures distorted due to epidemic
 of small pox

Sources: Overseers Accounts and Burial Registers
 (all five Parishes)

possibility of a permanently higher mortality here than elsewhere, because of its extensive poverty, cannot be overlooked. It may be significant that Maidstone, with a population more than double that of Cranbrook, has comparable burial figures. Support is also given to the hypothesis that after a period of dearth, mortality fell to well below average because of the 'weeding out' of weaklings. Taking all the parishes together, it is found that the rise for the second decade is fifteen per cent above the previous ten years. There is likewise a sharp drop in the decade 1701-1710 but incomplete records made accuracy impossible.

This chapter has been an attempt, using a variety of sources, to deduce the kind of nutritional standard possible by using the money the aged received as pensions, gifts or work. Its ability to maintain life, its relationship to malnutrition, resistance to infection and mortality have also been considered within the limits of the sources.

The main thrust of the argument has been that with parish aid alone, the old could survive when prices were reasonable, though some doubts still remain about the quality of the subsistence possible. Since the dole of money, namely the pension, and earnings in cash from whatever source were crucial to the standard of nutrition, the next chapter will be devoted to the question of how much money the pensioner could have to dispose, and at what age he or she could expect to have parish money for personal uses.

CHAPTER V - DIRECT RELIEF. PENSIONS. PAYMENT FOR WORK

The Pension

The vast majority of the aged received from the parish a small regular dole of money, termed the pension or the parish pay. It is not strictly comparable to the modern concept of a pension, which is a fixed amount, received at an age determined by legislation, and claimable regardless of where the old person lives, or has lived, or how the previous life has been spent. Under the Old Poor Law, each parish settled for itself, at the Annual Vestry, the number of pensioners for the forthcoming year, and how much each would receive. In general, when the pension had been assessed, it remained at the same level, rising only with the decline in the pauper's condition, or if extras were required in the way of medicines or lodging. On the other hand, if a parish was going through one of its periodic cost cutting exercises, pensions might be reduced, either by taking away a few pence each month or by giving the individual eleven monthly payments instead of twelve. Cranbrook fell back on both practices, whereas in Maidstone, after the collapse of Vestry Government in 1782, the Trustees reduced all pensions from 1s 6d a week to 1s 0d.⁽¹⁾ Widow Sarah Bullock of Cranbrook, for example, had her pension reduced from sixpence a week in 1743 to 1s 6d a month, a year later.⁽²⁾ After 1750, when the Cranbrook

1. K.A.O. P 241/11/11-12

2. K.A.O. P 100/12/1-4

accounts give only the monthly totals of pensions, it is noticeable that the final month invariably shows a total only half that of the rest of the year.⁽¹⁾ Tonbridge, heavily in debt to local tradesmen and gentry by 1745, gradually reduced the number of supported aged year by year from 1747 until, by 1750, all aged were in the workhouse and no out-pensioners remained.⁽²⁾

New applicants for a parish pension usually made their applications to the monthly vestry. They had the right to be accompanied by someone to present their case, a neighbour or relative; quite often it was the overseer himself who recommended them. This initial meeting and face to face contact provided a good basis to begin working out a suitable plan of relief. They could see for themselves the old person's present condition and circumstances. The Vestry would then discuss the case in private and make their decision.⁽³⁾ It is almost certain that some members of the Vestry would have been previously acquainted with the applicant and any pretence instantly detected, but the pensioner, if not satisfied with the treatment he had received, could complain personally or through a representative, to a local Justice, or even to Sessions.⁽⁴⁾ There is no direct evidence of such a procedure in the five selected parishes, since Vestry minutes have not survived,

1. K.A.O. P 100/12/4

2. K.A.O. P 371/12/4-5

3. K.A.O. P 233/8/1-2 (1729-30;1754-1773) Loose Vestry Mins.

4. K.A.O. Q/SB/11

but they have been found to operate in Loose⁽¹⁾, Lenham⁽²⁾ and East Farley⁽³⁾, all in close proximity to Maidstone and Goudhurst, adjacent to Cranbrook.⁽⁴⁾ It is reasonable to suppose that similar practices operated in the other parishes, and a similar procedure for assessing pensions seems also to have operated in other parts of the country.⁽⁵⁾

Loose Vestry minutes are precise and specific about the method to be adopted, and include the ruling that no pensioner was to have a pay cut until he or she had been given an opportunity to protest.⁽⁶⁾ The impression given by the study of all these records is of sincere men trying to carry out parochial duties for which they had been elected in as business like a manner as possible, within their financial resources, and allowing those affected by their decisions a measure of consideration.⁽⁷⁾ The dates of the Loose Vestry minutes are significant, well into the workhouse period when harsher attitudes than formerly are said to have prevailed towards the poor.⁽⁸⁾ The overseers, though occupying a crucial role towards them, were just as

2. K.A.O. P 224/8/1

3. K.A.O. P 142/8/1

4. K.A.O. P 157/8/1

5. H. Peet. Liverpool Vestry Minutes. Liverpool 1912. p 22
'It has been shown that the Vestry rules, and the disbursements show a great similarity nation-wide.'

6. op. cit. Loose minutes

7. B. Keith-Lucas. Parish Affairs. The Government of Kent under Geo. III. Maidstone 1986. p3; p103. Similar conclusions have been reached in this recent study of Kentish affairs.

8. D. Marshall. The English Poor in the Eighteenth Century. (2nd) ed. London 1969. pp 12 69.71. Hampson op. cit. p77
S. & B. Webb. op. cit. pp 215-242

much the servants of the Vestry as officials of the parish, and did not have unlimited power.

Pensions are to be regarded as part of a long continued practice of supporting the aged and not something introduced in 1601 as the result of compulsory rating. There is no controversy surrounding it, though on occasions a distinction seems to have been drawn by parish officers themselves between some old and others; between those entitled to a pension, that is a regular sum of money over a prolonged period of time, requiring only annual confirmation; and other old who received 'relief' on a monthly basis, and presumably assessed at each monthly Vestry meeting. Nurse Chambers, pensioner of Tonbridge from 1780 until 1794 (age 61 - 75) was assessed by the year as '1s 6d per week'.⁽¹⁾ On the other hand, Elizabeth Skinner, widow, was designated 'casual relief, worn out' in 1767. Her assistance was allocated each month, and occasionally omitted, none being given between April and July 1776, for example.⁽²⁾ When examined together, the case histories of Widows Chambers and Skinner show little difference in what they received over a period of years. It may be speculated that Widow Skinner, being only 59 years when she died, had not reached the qualifying age to be included on the parish pension list.⁽³⁾ Since she was in receipt of relief for eight years it does not appear to be a quirk of a particular

1. K.A.O. P371/12/5-6

2. K.A.O. P371/12/5

3. Tonbridge Burial Transcripts. K.A.O. TR/2451/1-2

overseer or clerk.

Wrotham was another parish which made this distinction. Old Wharton was always being 'given' odd sums over a number of years⁽¹⁾, while Old Hutching over the same period was in receipt of a 'Pension'. Yet there appears to be little difference in the way in which they were treated. Over the span of five years during which they were being supported by the parish, old Wharton received £7.7.9. in cash and kind, while Hutchings received £6.13.0.⁽²⁾ Both these old men were over 70 and living with their sons.⁽³⁾ It seems to be immaterial at this distance of time whether they were called pensioners or received casual relief.

The Overseers Accounts for any year of any parish appears to be dominated by long lists of these pensioners and recipients of casual relief. Critics of the Old Poor Law have seen in these the proof that money was being distributed over-generously. It has been shown earlier in this study that in actual fact the number of aged on permanent relief was small, when compared with the total population of the parish.⁽⁴⁾ But a cash payment undoubtedly had advantages for both the Vestry and the pensioner; a quick and easy method of giving relief, as against the time consuming work attached to obtaining goods and clothing and distributing them. In the treatment of the aged the pension was a ubiquitous and important item, but it was only one of

1. K.A.O. P406/12/3-4

2. K.A.O. P406/12/5

3. Ibid.

4. See Chapter I. p.36 & p.38, Tables 1.5; 1.6

the range of supportive services available, and was occasionally withdrawn in favour of one or other of them. Ellin Sands, a long-standing mental defective and pensioner of Cowden, had periods of 'lunacy' during which she could not be allowed to prepare her own food. At these times, the parish supplied her with her 'diet'.⁽¹⁾ Pensioners also received their food in lieu of a pension during periods of sickness, old Widow Buggs of Wrotham, for example, having eight pounds of flour, half a pound of butter and four ounces of cheese instead of her pension during a week's illness in March 1756; the cost of which was exactly equivalent to her weekly pay of 1s 6d.⁽²⁾

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF PENSIONS

Any attempt to make a comprehensive and complete analysis of the many grades of pensions given to the old is impossible because of the deficiency in the sources. All parish records are fragmentary. All overseers accounts have gaps, some of several years duration, during which moneys distributed as pensions are permanently lost. For the same reason, the pension lives of some individuals are incomplete, and some pensioners will have disappeared altogether. Additionally, the increasing tendency to telescope accounts into annual sums as the workload of overseers and clerks became heavier during the late eighteenth century, compounds the problem. These handicaps should not rule out an attempt at analysis, and the tables

1. K.A.O. P99/12/2
2. K.A.O. P406/12/5

which have been prepared on the basis of the recoverable information, convey an aspect of the treatment of the aged poor, not readily apparent from a study of overseers accounts alone.

The principal objective has been to discover what parish officers considered to be reasonable levels of monetary relief when given on a regular basis; what sums were most commonly allotted. How did the pension size change with respect to a particular individual? Was it with the rise and fall of available parish resources? with age? with price changes? or with increasing disability or sickness? The prepared tables cannot provide answers to all these economic and social questions, but can go a long way towards explaining the ideas guiding parish officers in deciding suitable pension levels for their aged paupers.

Pension sizes, by the week or month, were assessed at the Annual Vestry in April of each year, when new officers were elected. For the purpose of this analysis, all pensions have been reduced to weekly sums. Only those assessments where the pensioner received the sum for a complete year are included. Anyone who died or who was added to the pension list during the course of the year has been ignored. Those who received 'relief', whether regularly or not, and those who bear all the other characteristics of pensioners, have also been left out. This left only those given a pension as recognised and for at least a year to be included. Thus, for instance, Old John Gull, who received a shilling a week from Maidstone parish for twenty-four weeks in 1715, is not

TABLES OF ANNUAL ASSESSEMENTS

COWDEN

Table 5.1 1650/1700

Sum	Number	Percentage	Percentage of total
6d	3	6.5	13.0
9d	3	6.5	
1s 0d	16	34.8	
1s 3d	2	4.3	71.7
1s 6d	14	30.4	
1s 9d	1	2.2	
2s 0d	2	4.3	15.1
2s 6d+	5	10.8	
	46	99.8	99.8

Table 5.2 1700/1750

Sum	Number	Percentage	Percentage of total
6d	13	9.7	13.4
9d	2	1.5	
10d	3	2.2	
1s 0d	46	34.3	76.0
1s 3d	12	8.9	
1s 6d	5	3.7	
1s 9d	5	3.7	10.4
2s 0d	13	9.7	
2s 6d+	1	0.7	
	134	99.8	99.8

Table 5.3 1751/1800

Sum	Number	Percentage	Percentage of total
6d	12	5.6	7.5
9d	3	1.4	
10d	1	0.5	
1s 0d	55	26.9	73.0
1s 3d	20	9.6	
1s 6d	58	26.9	
1s 9d	20	9.6	20.0
2s 0d	21	9.8	
2s 6d	5	2.3	
2s 6d+	17	7.9	100.5
	215	100.5	

Figure 5.1

COWDEN

Annual Assessments for Pensions 1650/1700

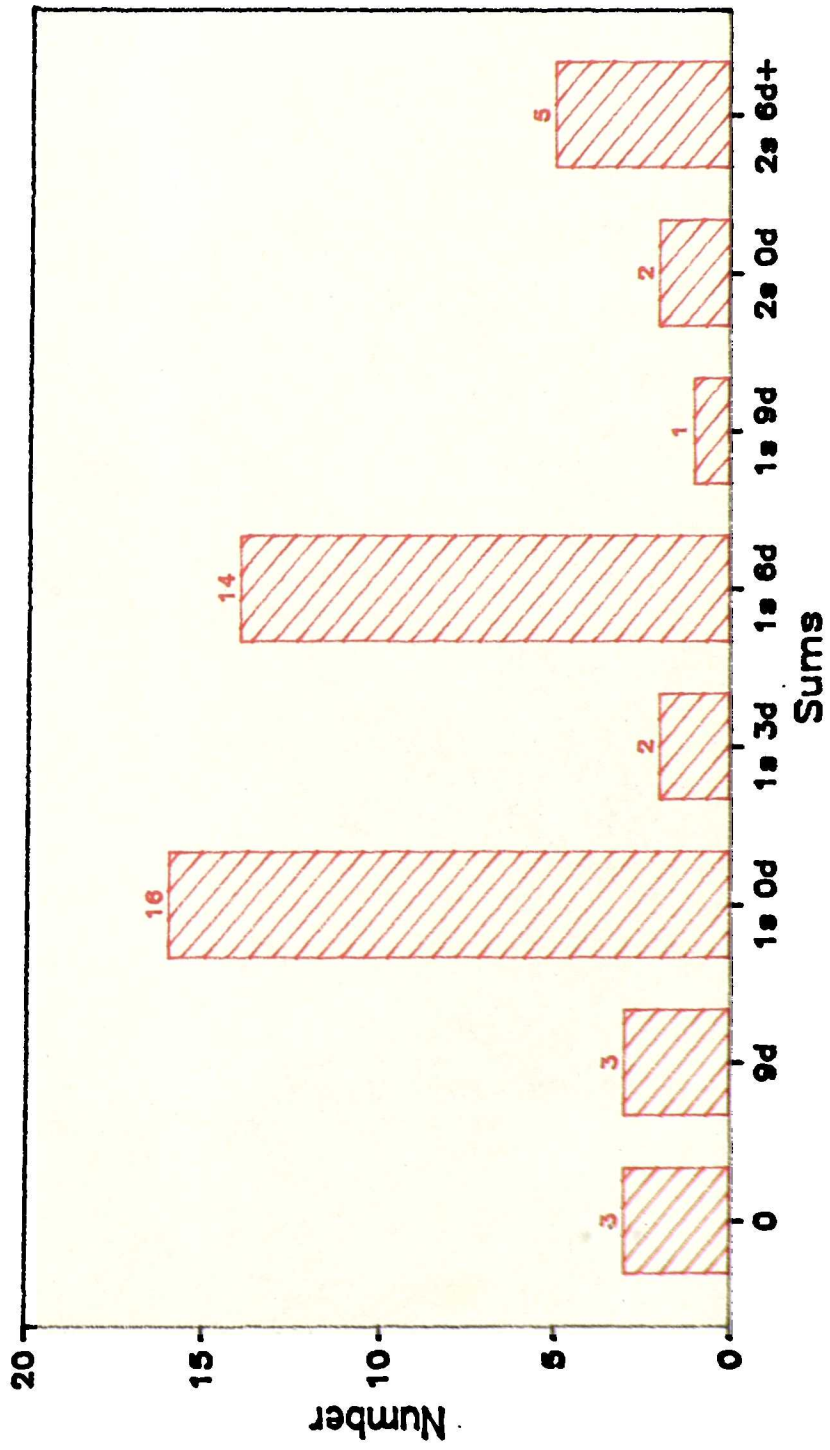


Figure 5.2

COWDEN

Annual Assessments for Pensions 1700/1750

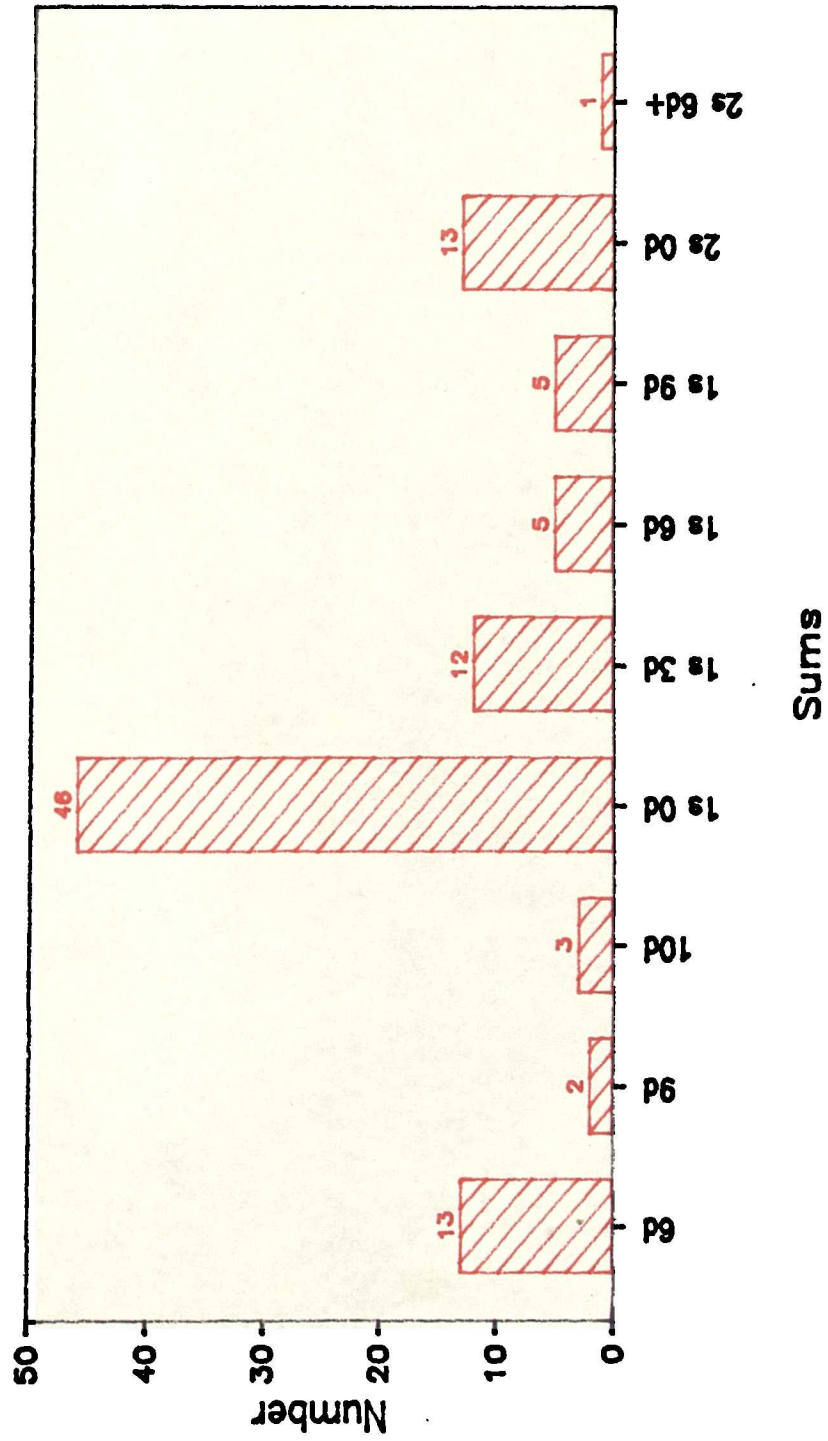
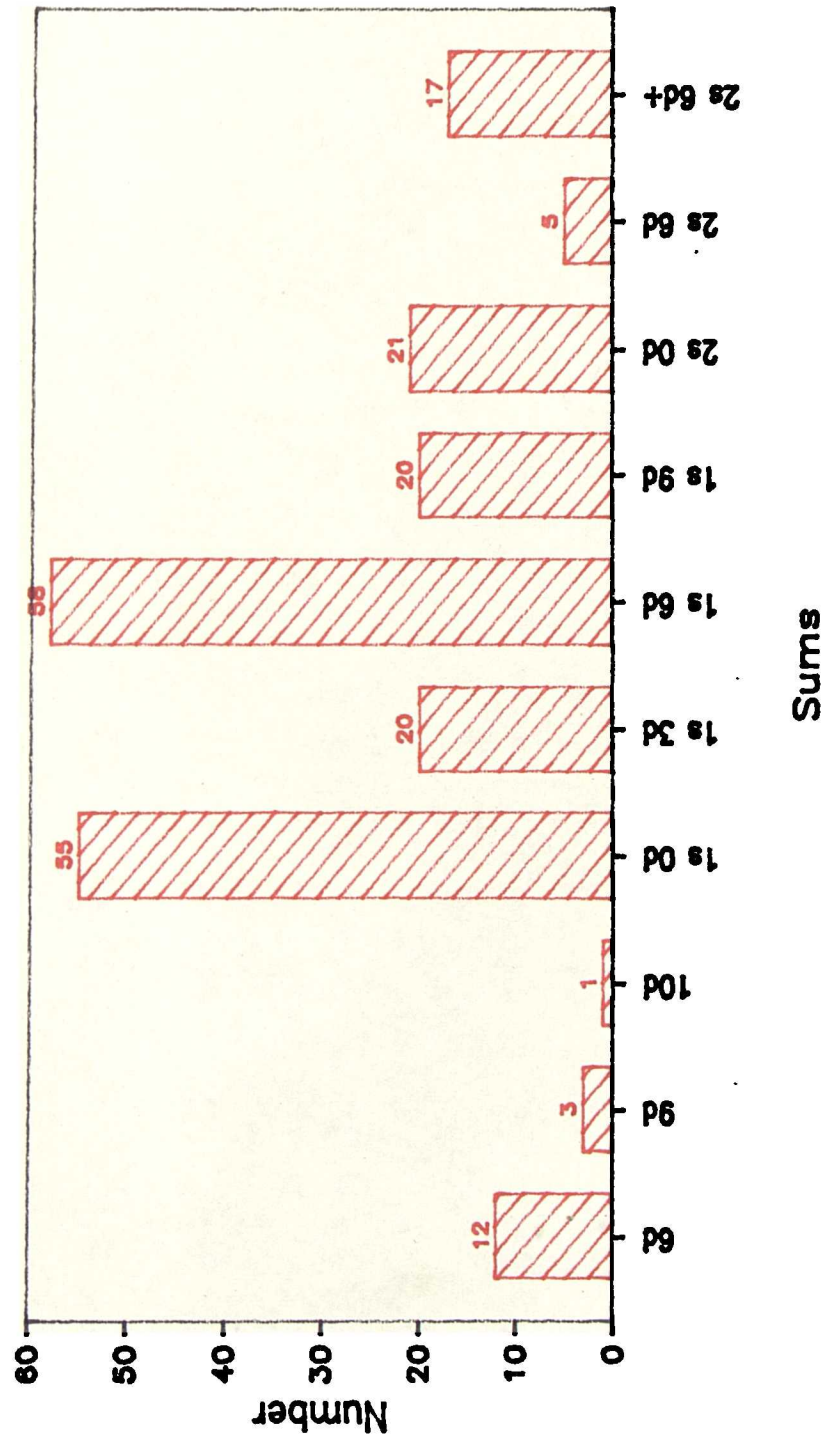


Figure 5.3

COWDEN Annual Assessments for Pensions 1751/1800



included, though he is included from 1716 to 1719 when his shilling spanned the whole year.⁽¹⁾ Similarly, Old Penvall, pensioner of Maidstone but resident in Cranbrook, is included with the Maidstone analysis for the years 1715 to 1719. Though still alive in 1720 he did not complete a whole year as pensioner, being among the first inmates of Maidstone workhouse, opened August 1720.⁽²⁾

It is the frequency of distribution of particular sums which has been of prime importance in this analysis. Widow Godden, of Wrotham, who received one shilling a week from 1744 to 1749, as complete years, contributes six times to the shilling column of her parish, once for each year⁽³⁾. Old Savage of Maidstone, who had a pension of a shilling a week for one year, then two shillings weekly for the remaining four years of his life, contributes once to Maidstone's shilling column (1671) and four times to its two shilling column (1672-1675).⁽⁴⁾ Each completed year of an individual's pension life is included somewhere, provided the information has been available in the sources.

For greater facility in handling the material, and ease of presentation, the resultant data have been divided into three time blocks of approximately fifty years. Coincidentally, these can also be considered in relation to the effects on the workings of the Old Poor Law of such events as workhouses, policy changes and the impact of the

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1. K.A.O. P241/11/5
 2. Ibid.
 3. K.A.O. P406/12/5
 4. K.A.O. P241/11/4

TABLES OF ANNUAL ASSESSEMENTS

CRANBROOK

Table 5.4 1650/1700

Sum	Number	Percentage	Percentage of total
3d	2	0.3	37.1
4½d	12	1.8	
6d	91	13.5	
9d	136	20.2	
10d	9	1.3	
1s 0d	170	25.3	58.1
1s 3d	106	15.8	
1s 6d	84	12.5	
1s 9d	30	4.5	
2s 0d	15	2.2	4.7
2s 6d	17	2.5	
	672	99.9	99.9

Table 5.5 1700/1708

Sum	Number	Percentage	Percentage of total
4½d	3	2.6	26.3
6d	12	10.5	
9d	15	13.2	
1s 0d	32	28.1	64.9
1s 3d	22	19.3	
1s 6d	20	17.5	
2s 0d	8	7.0	8.8
2s 6d	2	1.8	
	114	100.0	100.0

. No assesement after 1708
 . Records missing 1708-1722
 Workhouse opened 1723
 No pensioners after that date,
 all payments in bulk

Figure 5.4

CRANBROOK Annual Assessments for Pensions 1650/1700

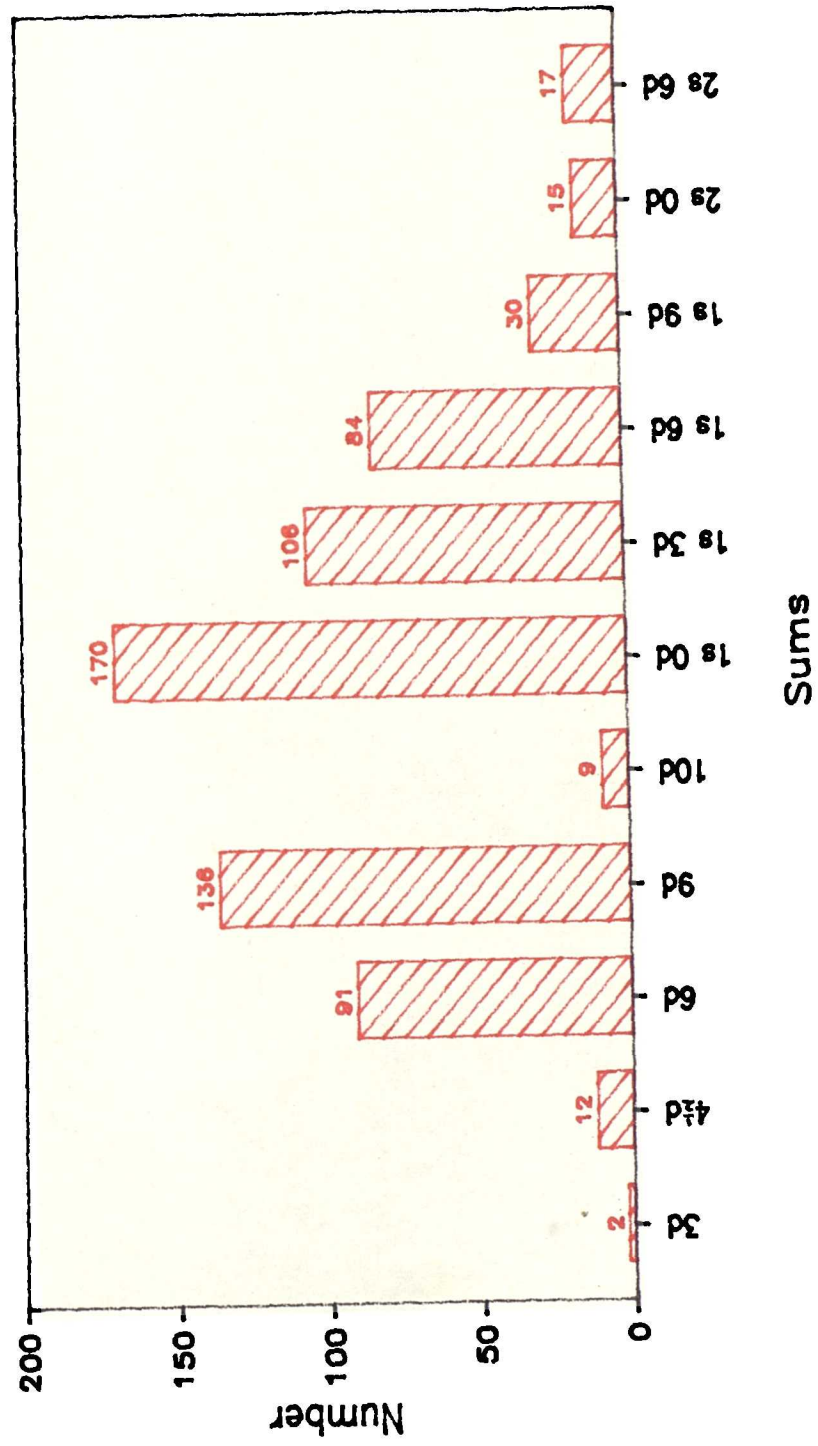
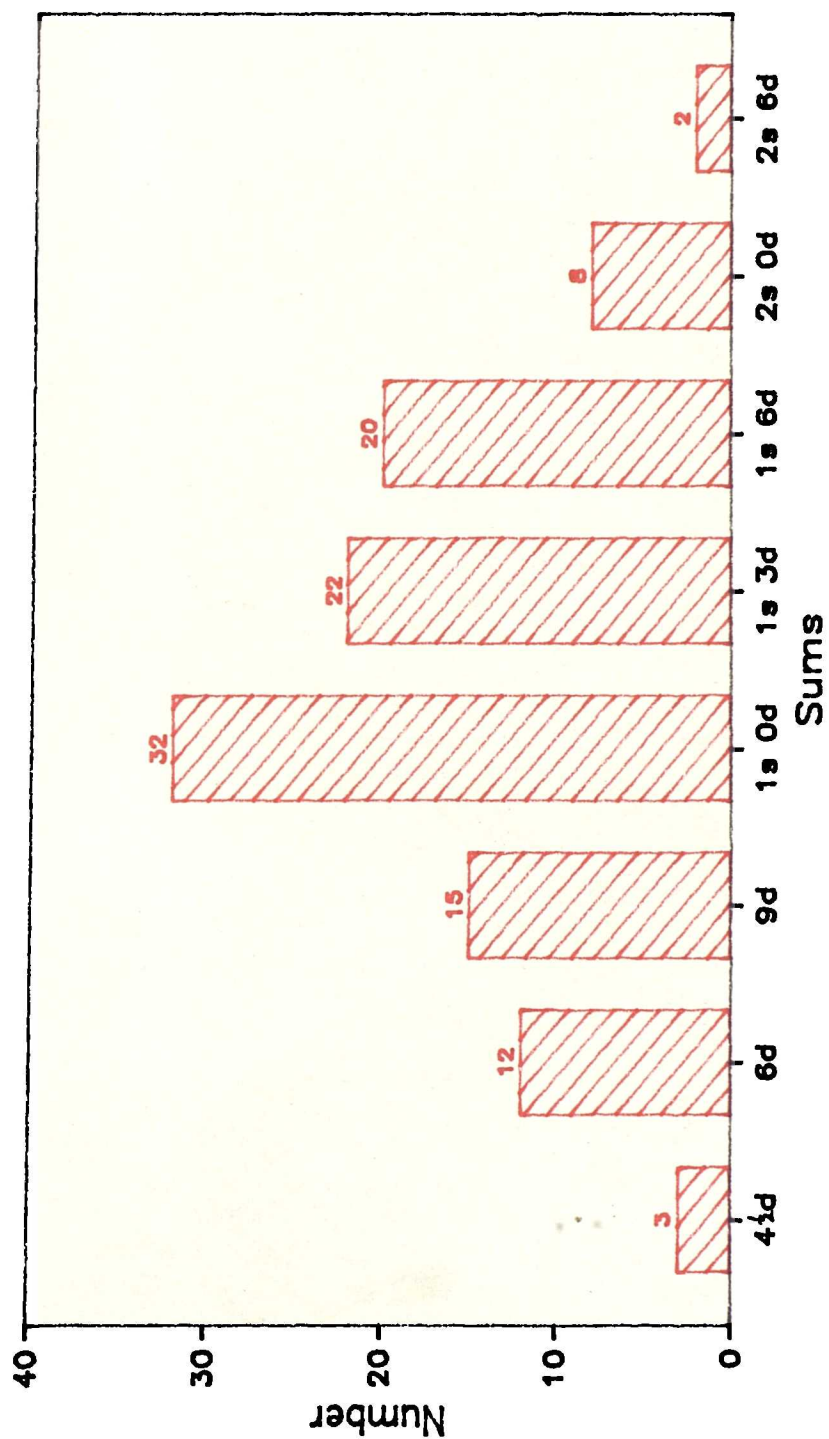


Figure 5.5

CRANBROOK Annual Assessments for Pensions 1700/1708



clerical changes on the accounts themselves. The first block, from 1660 to 1700 is wholly pre-workhouse, and is characteristic of the maturing poor law. The second period from 1700 to 1750, includes the effect of the introduction of the workhouse from 1723, and the period of the most rigorous workhouse policy. From 1750 to the end of the century, while being the most unreliable because of the fragility of the documentation, also covers that period when changes were occurring in workhouse policy towards the aged. Dividing the century and half which the study covers into these smaller time spans provides, in addition, a means of comparing pension levels over time and between parish and parish.

The most striking feature to have emerged from this detailed analysis is how closely all the parishes resembled each other in their ideas of what constituted a reasonable pension, and how little these ideas changed over the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, despite the pressures of death, population increase and, later, war and economic dislocation in prices.

In each parish a pension of one shilling and sixpence a week far outstripped all other sums, with a shilling and two shillings following in popularity. Between two-thirds and three quarters of all assessments were of this order. Pensions falling below these margins would seem to suggest the availability of other resources, such as payment for work or charitable gifts. Higher rates, so the case histories reveal, point to additional needs, such as payment

TABLES OF ANNUAL ASSESSEMENTS

MAIDSTONE

Table 5.6 1650/1700

Sum	Number	Percentage	Percentage of total
6d	13	1.7	2.2
9d	4	0.5	
1s 0d	300	38.6	73.9
1s 3d	24	3.1	
1s 6d	242	31.2	
1s 9d	8	1.0	
2s 0d	162	20.9	23.8
2s 6d+	23	2.9	
	776	99.9	99.9

Table 5.7 1700/1750

Sum	Number	Percentage	Percentage of total
6d	17	2.6	3.2
9d	4	0.6	
1s 0d	151	22.9	69.2
1s 3d	7	1.1	
1s 6d	294	44.7	
1s 9d	3	0.5	
2s 0d	157	23.9	27.7
2s 6d	21	3.2	
3s 0d	4	0.6	
	658	100.0	100.0

Table 5.8 1750/1782

Sum	Number	Percentage	Percentage of total
6d	2	0.9	0.9
9d	0	0.0	
1s 0d	119	51.0	84.5
1s 3d	3	1.3	
1s 6d	72	30.9	
1s 9d	3	1.3	
2s 0d	30	12.9	14.7
2s 6d	2	0.9	
3s 0d	2	0.9	
	233	100.0	100.0

Figure 5.6

MAIDSTONE

Annual Assessments for Pensions 1650/1700

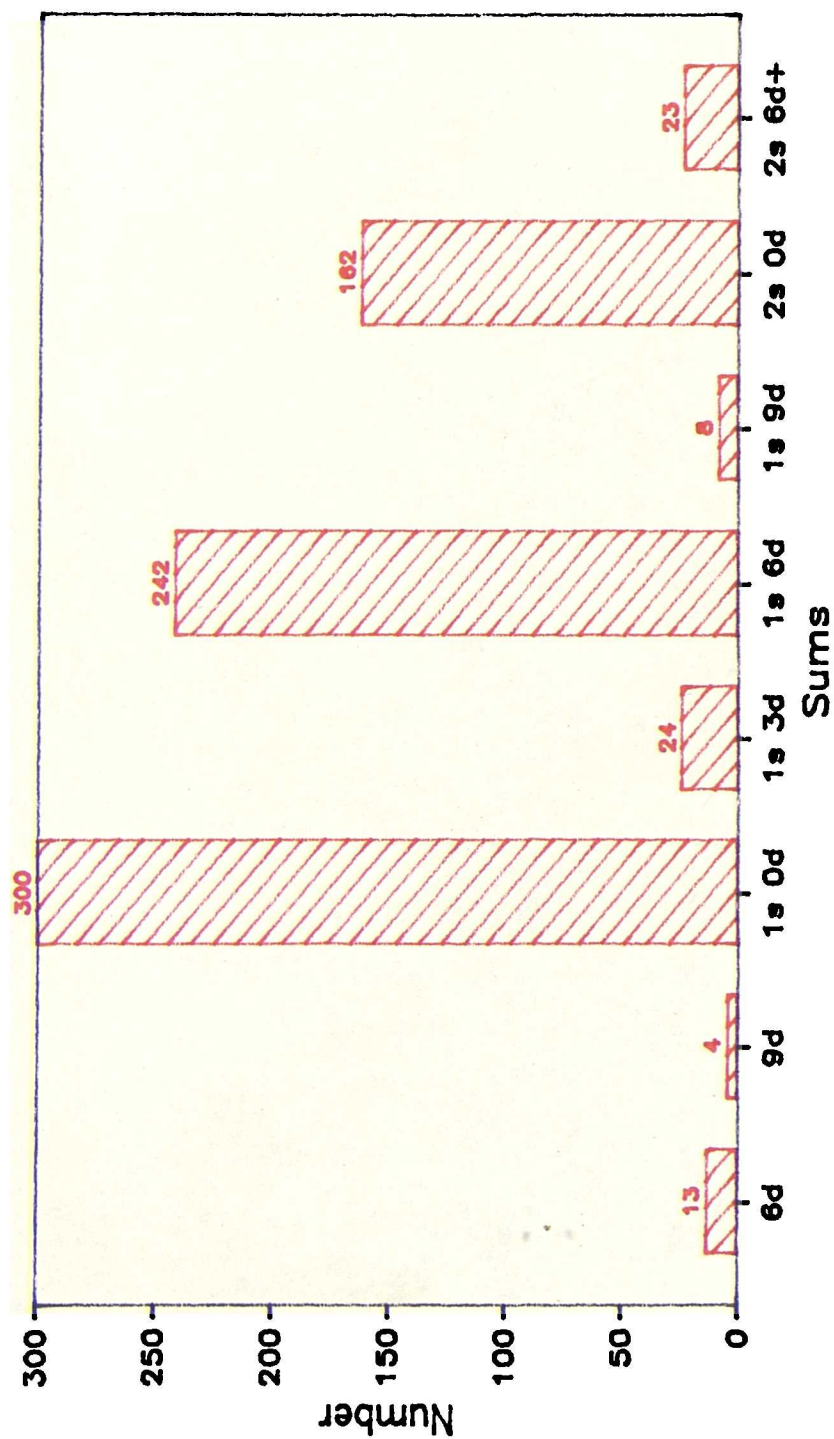


Figure 5.7

MAIDSTONE

Annual Assessments for Pensions 1700/1750

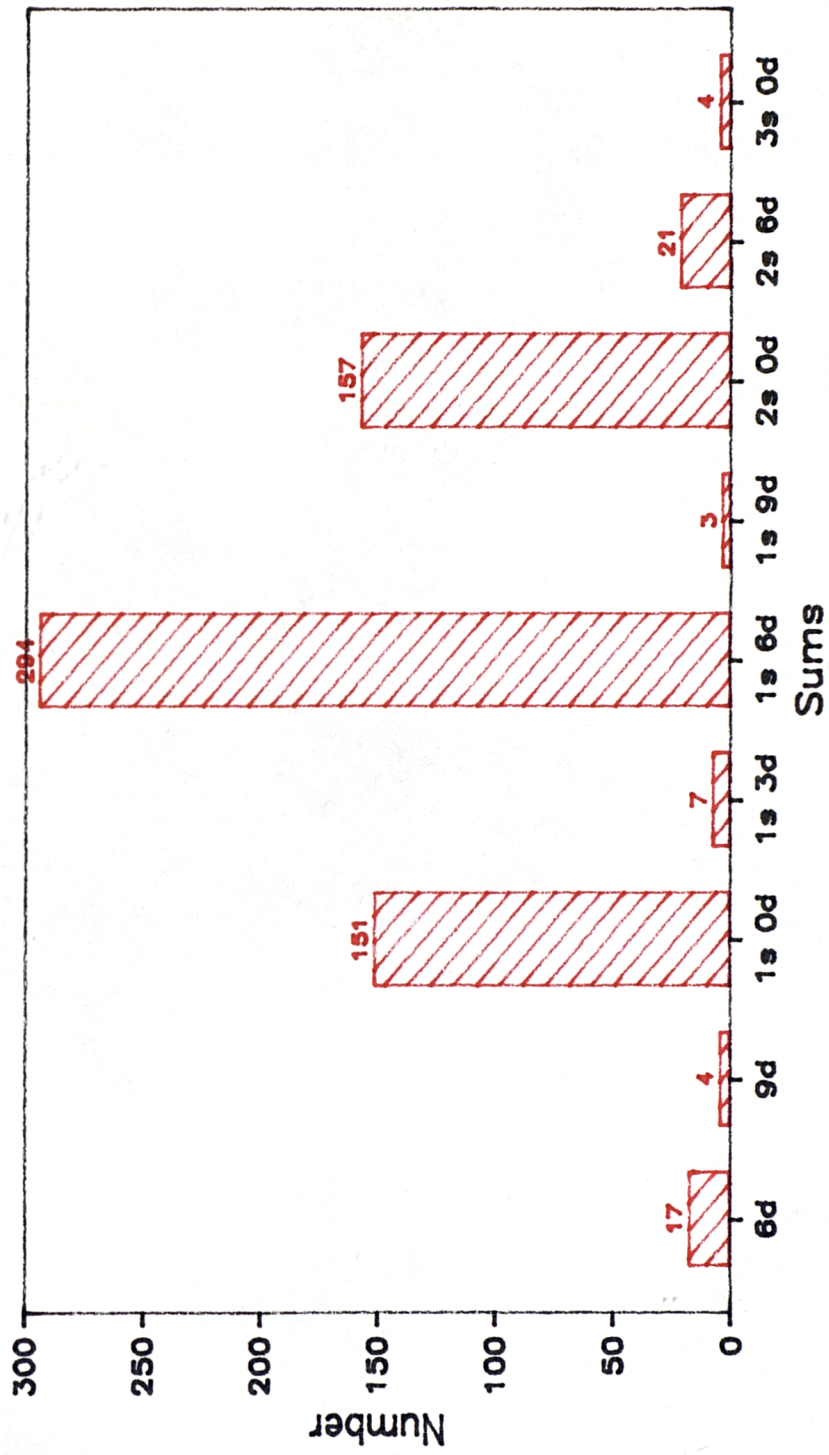
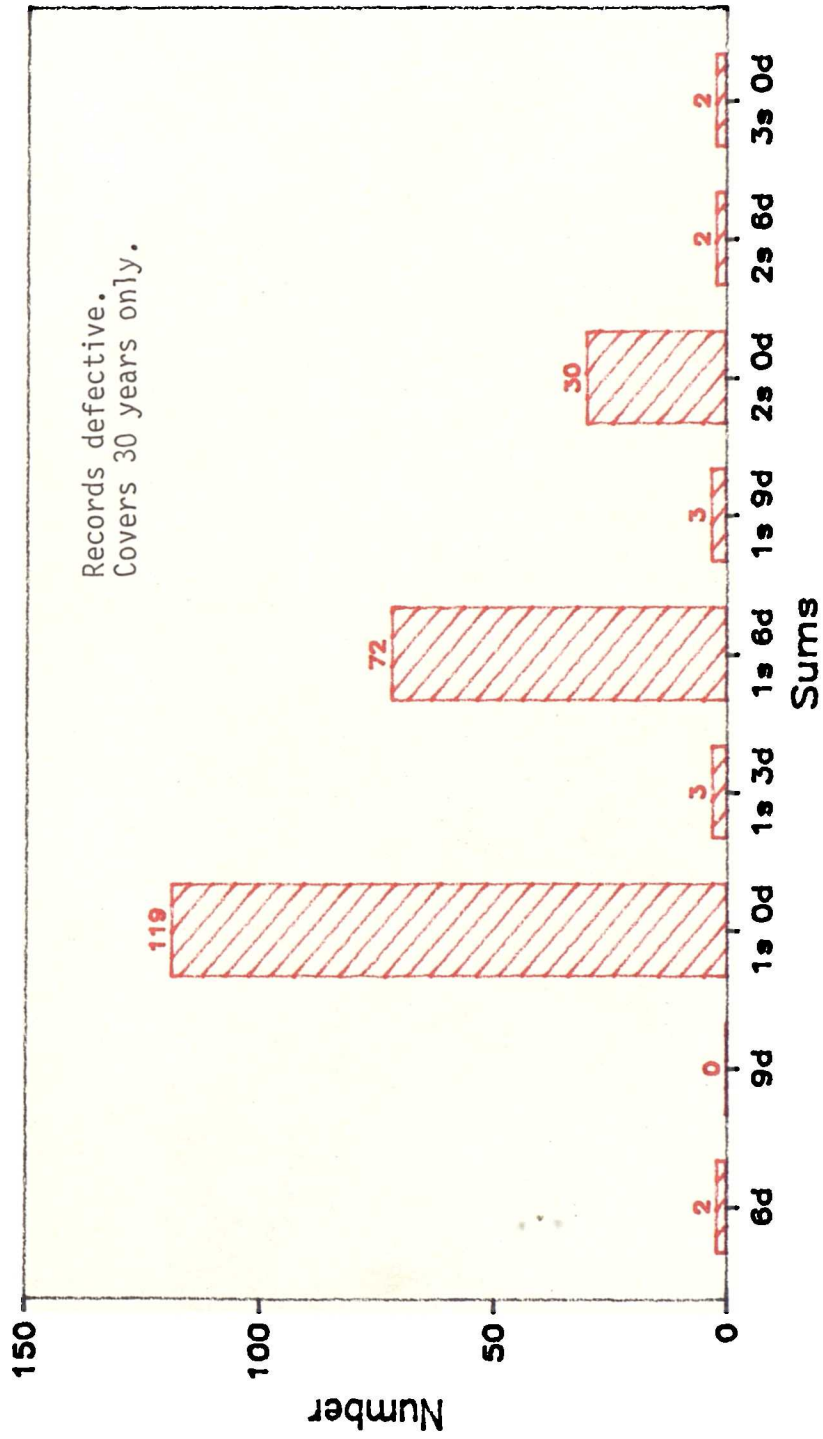


Figure 5.8

MAIDSTONE

Annual Assessments for Pensions 1750/1782



for lodging, washing, attendance or regular medicines. The highest rates such as two shillings and sixpence or over are often indicative of an extra person to support, sometimes the wife or child of the pensioner, the latter often an adult and handicapped, but not mentioned in the accounts until the death of the pensioner.⁽¹⁾

As was shown in Chapter IV, when wheat and bread were cheap or reasonable in price, a pension of one shilling and sixpence would provide a basic diet, sufficient in calories by modern calculations to ensure survival, provided it was all spent on food. There seems to be no indication of any change in parish practice during periods of very high prices, though there appears to be a slight shift towards higher pension levels at the end of the eighteenth century as prices rose permanently⁽²⁾ but this move cannot be adequately reflected in the tables, because of the growing tendency in the accounts of entering pensions as one annual sum, thus subsuming all individual pensions.

While the levels of the weekly pensions remained relatively static for the whole period, the number of pensioners did not. Tables for the period 1700-1750 show a sharp drop in the number of assessments compared with the previous fifty years, with the exception of Cowden. This reflects the increasing use made of workhouses to accommodate the aged after 1723. Cowden did not resort to workhouse treatment until 1768.⁽³⁾ During the middle period

1. K.A.O. P406/12/5

2. Gilboy. op. cit. p 56-57

3. K.A.O. P99/12/2

TABLES OF ANNUAL ASSESSEMENTS

TONBRIDGE

Table 5.9 1650/1700

Sum	Number	Percentage	Percentage of total
4½d	6	1.3	38.6
6d	118	25.1	
9d	57	12.2	
1s 0d	133	28.4	55.3
1s 3d	50	10.7	
1s 6d	76	16.2	
2s 0d	13	2.8	6.2
2s 6d+	16	3.4	
	469	100.1	100.1

Table 5.10 1700/1750

Sum	Number	Percentage	Percentage of total
6d	74	19.3	27.1
9d	30	7.8	
1s 0d	143	37.2	66.6
1s 3d	40	10.4	
1s 6d	73	19.0	
2s 0d	6	1.6	6.3
2s 6d+	18	4.7	
	384	100.0	100.0

Table 5.11 1750/1800

Sum	Number	Percentage	Percentage of total
6d	26	10.7	16.5
9d	14	5.8	
1s 0d	121	49.8	77.0
1s 3d	16	6.6	
1s 6d	50	20.6	
2s 0d	16	6.6	6.6
2s 6d+	0	0.0	
	243	100.1	100.1

Figure 5.9

TONBRIDGE

Annual Assessments for Pensions 1650/1700

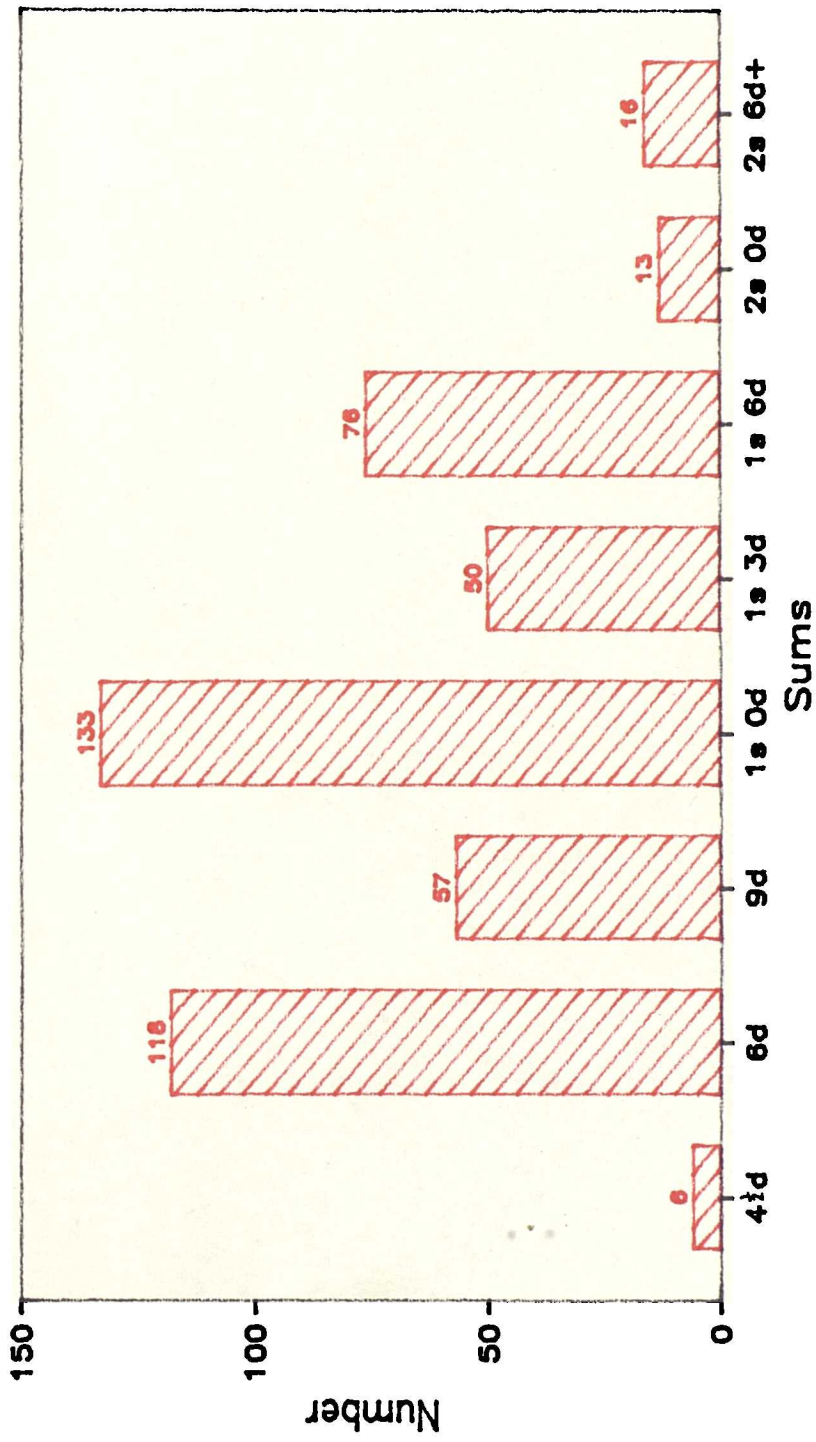


Figure 5.10

TONBRIDGE Annual Assessments for Pensions 1700/1750

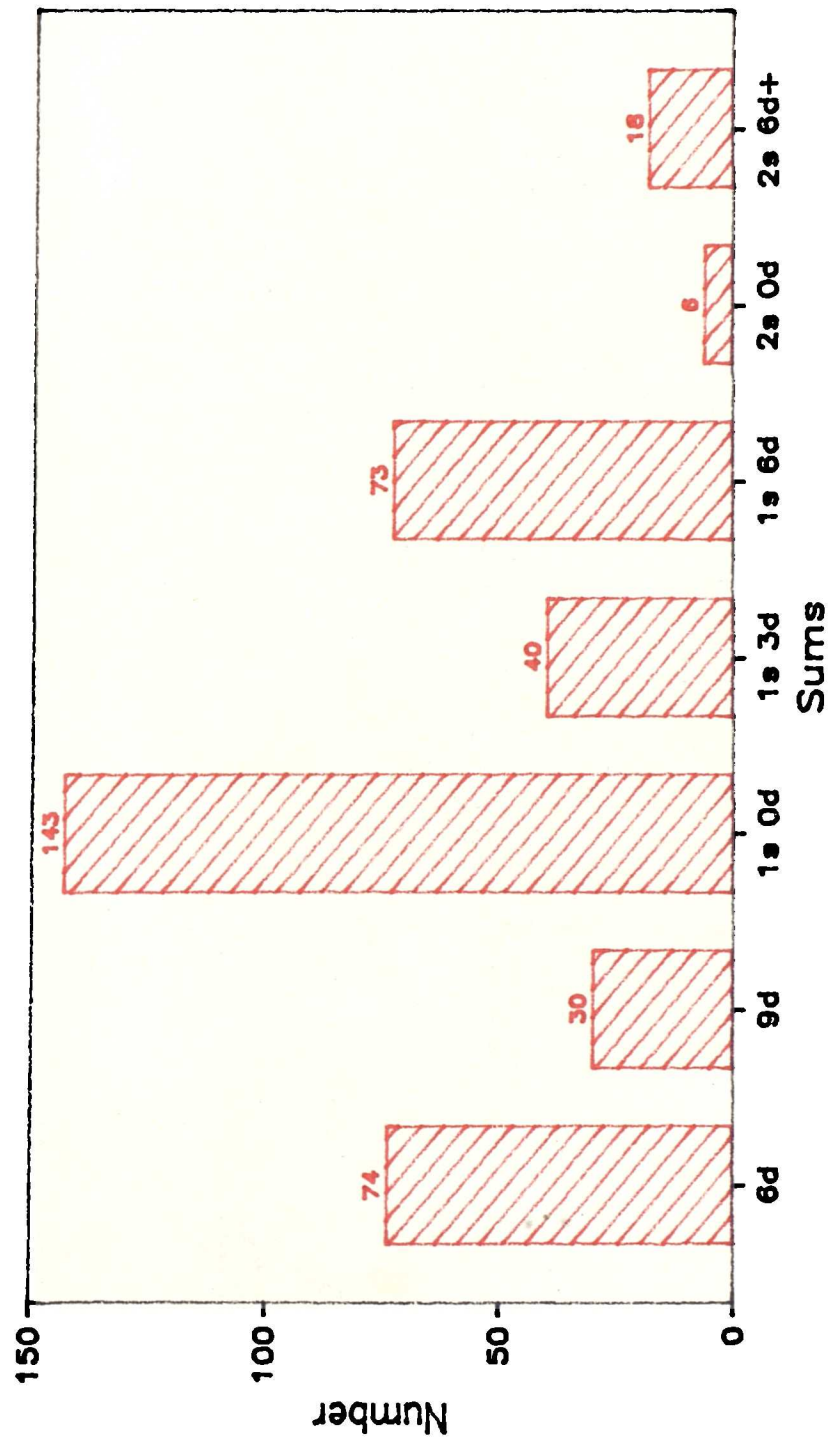
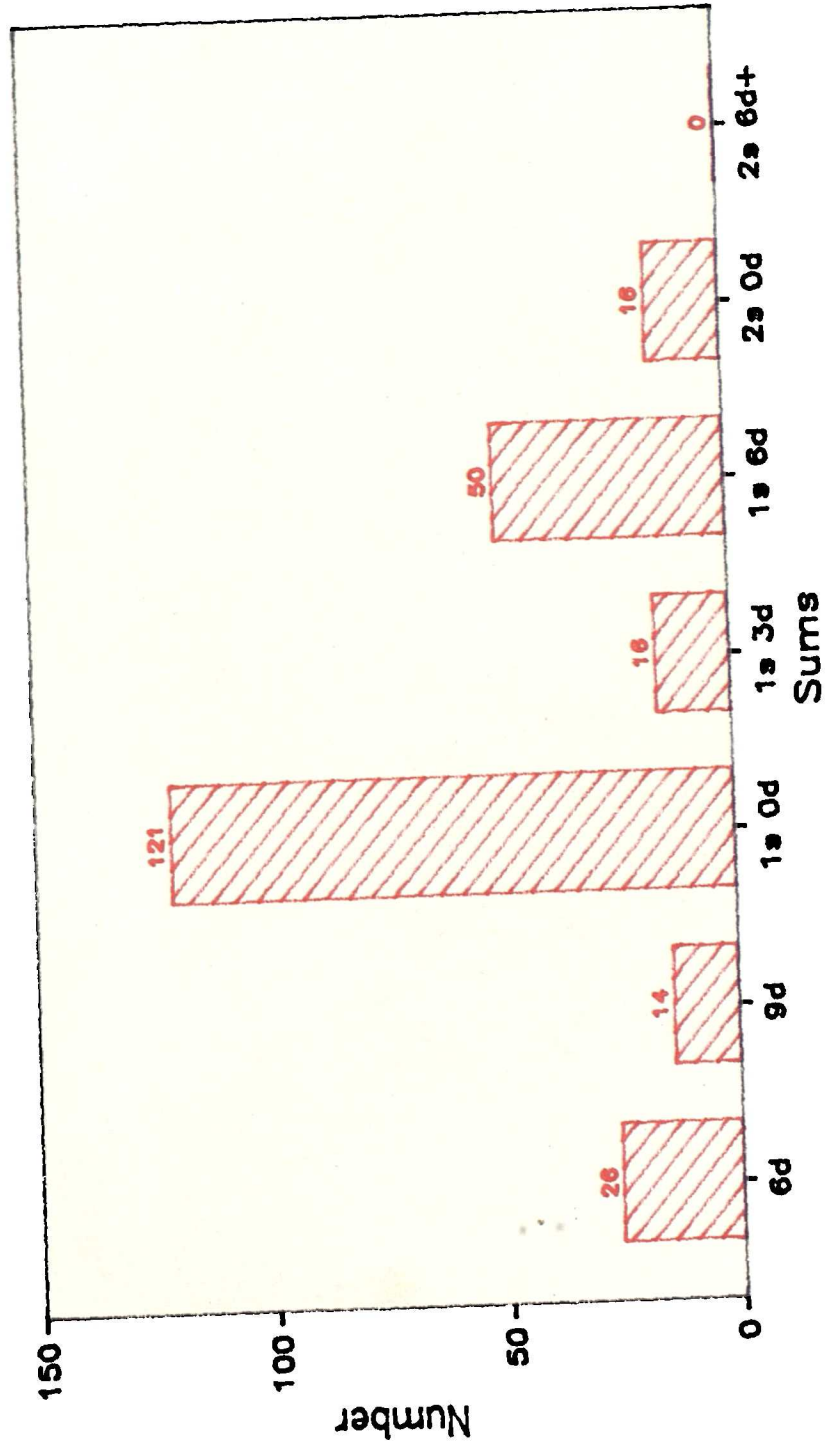


Figure 5.11

TONBRIDGE Annual Assessments for Pensions 1750/1800



the tendency was for all the aged to spend a somewhat shorter period as out-pensioners and then end their days in the workhouse. In the early days following the Knatchbull Workhouse Law⁽¹⁾, when the workhouse policy was at its most vigorous, many of the aged were swept in as soon as they became pensionable, so that they are no longer traceable, but as will be discussed in the chapter on the role of workhouses, many also remained outside.

It has proved impossible to make any kind of assessment analysis for Cranbrook after 1750, or for Maidstone after 1782. The former was due to the telescoping of accounts while the latter resulted from the collapse of Vestry government, due to enormous debt, and the abandonment of the Old Poor Law for the introduction, by Act of Parliament, of the Trustees of the Poor⁽²⁾, whose records are no longer available. The rise in the number of pension assessments is otherwise unmistakable.

This may be attributed to several causes; rising total numbers of pensioners making for full workhouses. Maidstone and Wrotham both extended their workhouse accommodation in the 1760's.⁽³⁾ Tonbridge began to lease Peach Hall Farm House for the same reason in 1777, using it for short stay inmates⁽⁴⁾; while from 1782, Cranbrook doubled its workhouse room from 50 to 100 places by the acquisition of

1. 1723. 9 Geo. II.c.7

2. An Act to Ensure Better Government of the Town and Parish of Maidstone. Kent County Library Collection. A 54200.

3. K.A.O. P241/11/ ; K.A.O. P406/12/27

4. K.A.O. P100/8/2

TABLES OF ANNUAL ASSESSEMENTS

WROTHAM

Table 5.12 1650/1700

Sum	Number	Percentage	Percentage of total
6d	0	0.0	7.3
9d	14	7.3	
1s 0d	61	31.9	69.6
1s 3d	3	1.6	
1s 6d	67	35.1	
1s 9d	3	1.6	
2s 0d	27	14.1	22.5
2s 6d	16	8.4	
	191	100.0	100.0

Table 5.13 1701/1750

Sum	Number	Percentage	Percentage of total
6d	2	0.8	11.0
9d	25	10.2	
1s 0d	97	39.8	79.9
1s 3d	30	12.3	
1s 6d	54	22.1	
1s 9d	14	5.7	
2s 0d	14	5.7	8.9
2s 6d	4	1.6	
3s 0d	4	1.6	
	244	99.8	99.8

Table 5.14 1751/1800

Sum	Number	Percentage	Percentage of total
6d	3	1.1	2.2
9d	3	1.1	
1s 0d	122	44.0	79.4
1s 3d	2	0.7	
1s 6d	96	34.7	
1s 9d	0	0.0	
2s 0d	45	16.2	18.4
2s 6d	5	1.5	
3s 0d	1	0.4	
	277	100.0	100.0

Figure 5.12

WROTHAM
Annual Assessments for Pensions 1650/1700

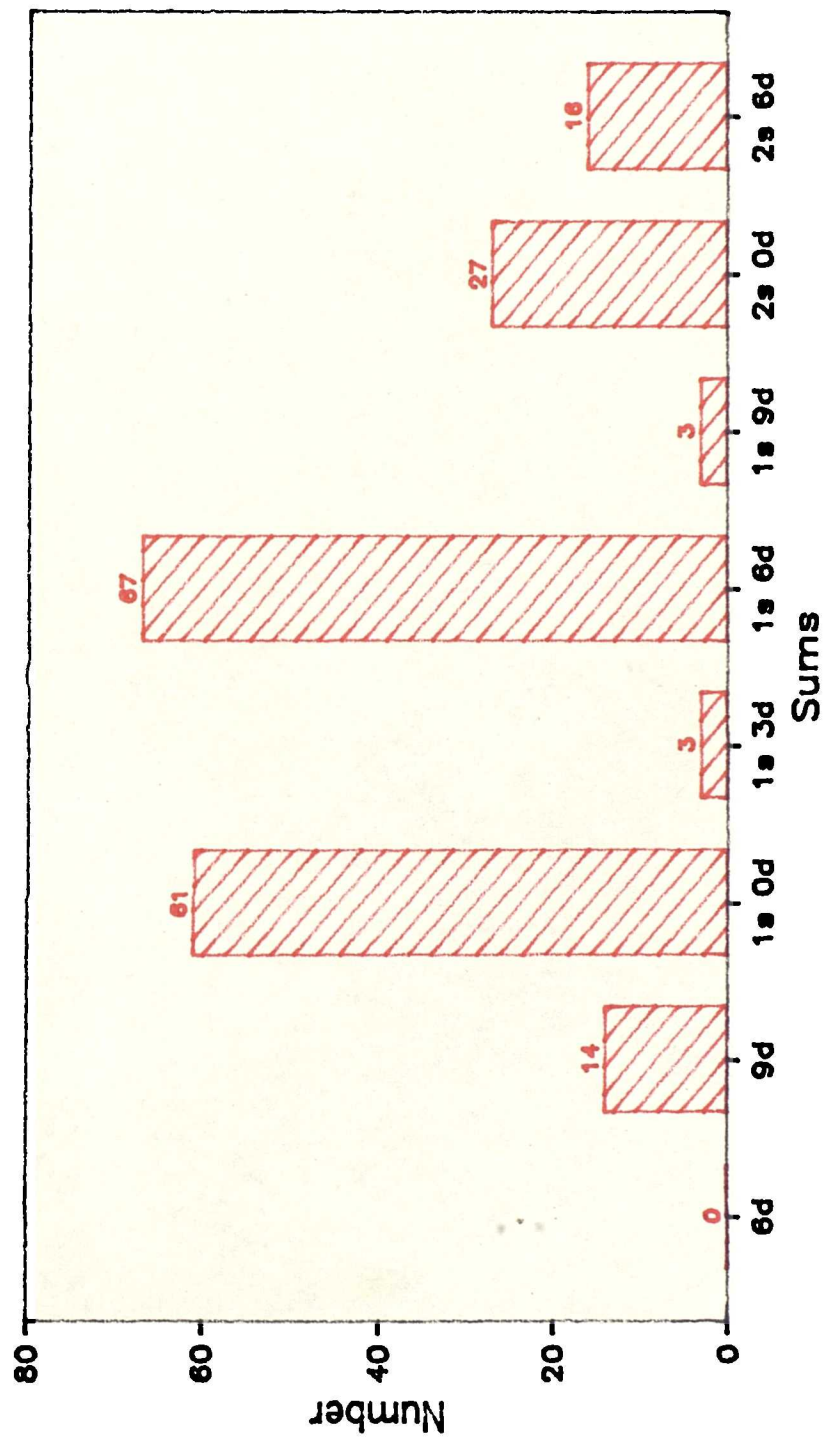


Figure 5.13

WROTHAM

Annual Assessments for Pensions 1701/1750

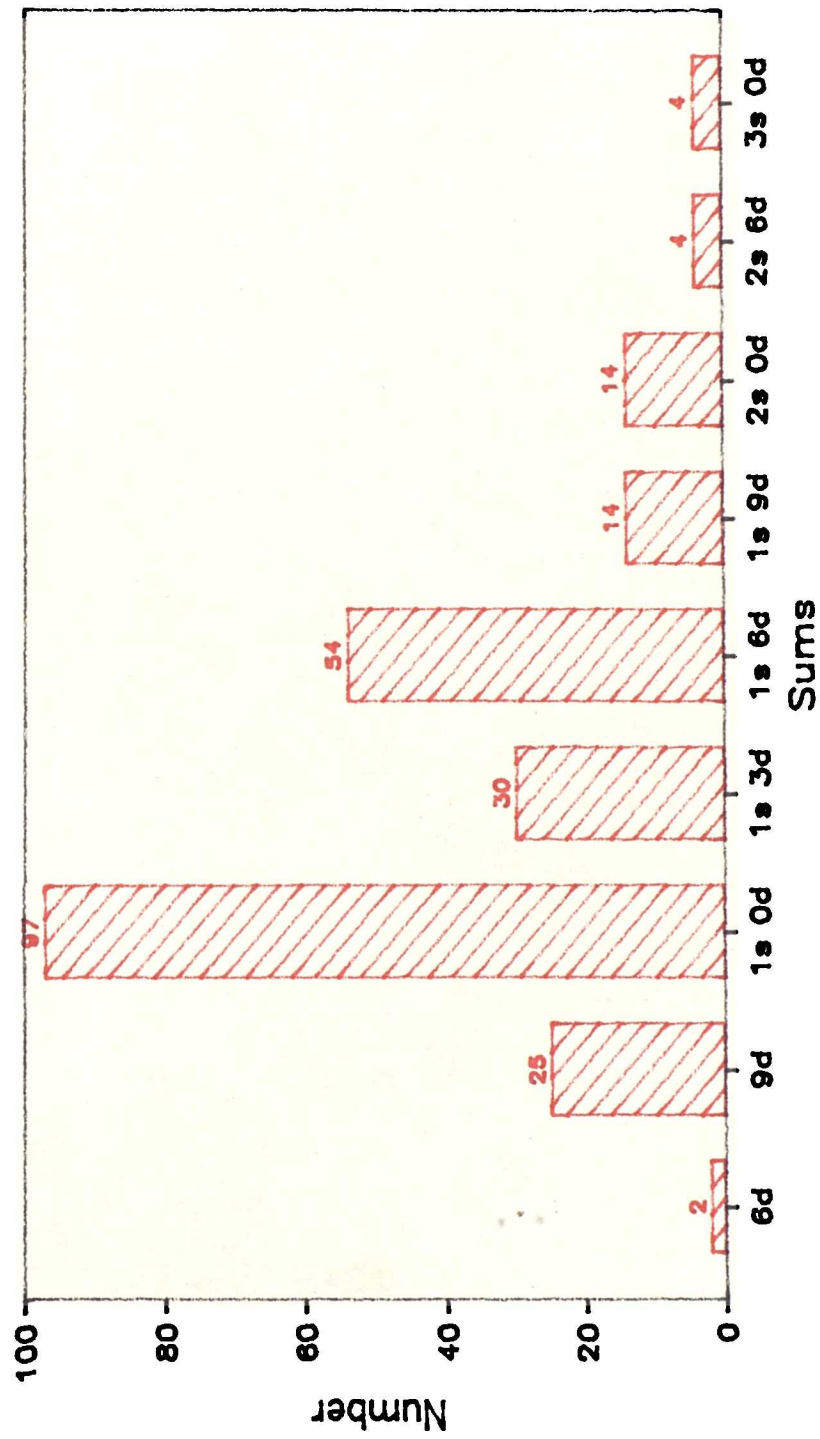


Figure 5.14

WROTHAM

Annual Assessments for Pensions 1751/1800

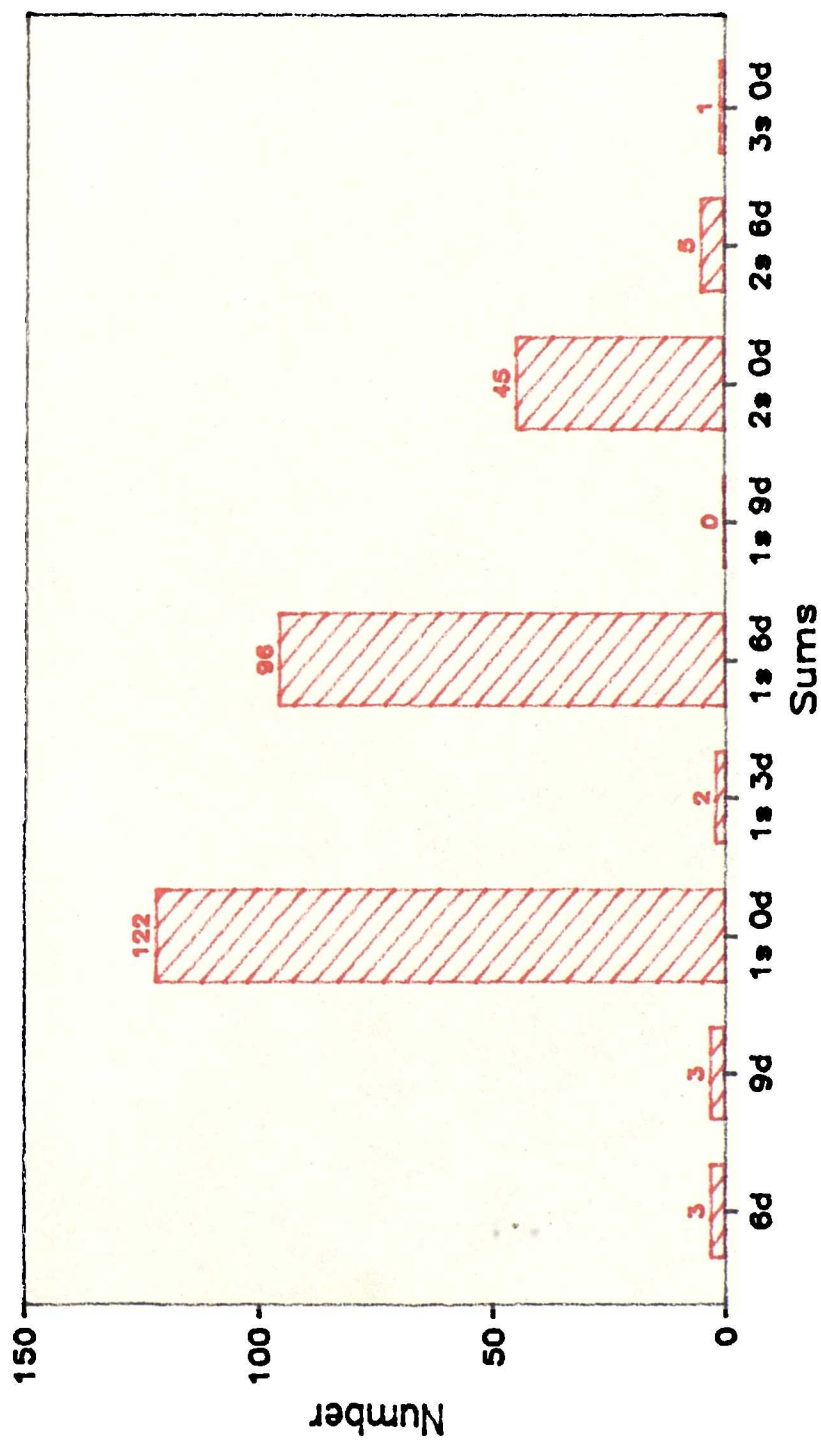


Table 5.15

TABLE SHOWING
COMPARISON OF ASSESSEMENTS BY PARISHES

	1650		1700		1700		1750		1750		1800	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(3)
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
COWDEN	13.0	71.7	15.1	13.4	76.0	10.4	7.5	73.0			20.0	
CRANBROOK	37.1	58.1	4.7	26.3	64.9	8.8	No information					
MAIDSTONE	2.2	73.9	23.8	3.2	69.2	27.7	0.9	84.5			14.7	
TONBRIDGE	38.6	55.3	6.2	27.1	66.6	6.3	16.5	77.0			6.6	
WROTHAM	7.3	69.6	22.5	11.0	79.9	8.9	2.2	79.4			15.4	

Legend:

- (1) Assessments under 1s 0d.
- (2) Assessments of between 1s 0d and 2s 0d.
- (3) Assessments of 2s 6d and over

Sissinghurst Castle to house its paupers.⁽¹⁾ There is also evidence that parishes adopted a policy of leaving the aged out of the workhouse for as long as possible rather than forcing them in as soon as possible.

Table 5.15 summarises and compares the situation to be found in the individual parishes. It shows both the differences and similarities. The overwhelming assessment of between one shilling and two shillings seems to leave no doubt that this was considered the most suitable level.

The information gathered by the analysis of pensions has been collated with that gleaned about the pensioners from the overseers accounts and parish registers to reach some tentative conclusions about parish operations in the field of money doles. In the light of previous discoveries it has been assumed that all five parishes, as in so many other aspects of Poor Relief, operated in very similar ways.

An examination of the case histories which constitute Appendix Two [A.2] shows clearly that there was no legal or generally acceptable pensionable age, comparable to that of the twentieth century. Under the Old Poor Law, the aged received a pension when, and if, the Vestry considered it applicable to them. Consequently, there was a whole range of ages at which this occurred. Comparison of the ages show it to have extended from below sixty years to above eighty, with the vast majority falling between the ages of sixty-one

1. K.A.O. P100/8/2

Table 5.16 AVERAGE AGE AT WHICH PENSIONS WERE
RECEIVED FOR THE FIRST TIME

PARISH	MALES	FEMALES	SEX DIFFERENCE (YEARS)
Cowden	70.6	67.4	3.2
Cranbrook	68.9	63.5	5.4
Maidstone	70.0	66.7	3.3
Tonbridge	70.3	65.3	5.0
Wrotham	69.5	68.1	1.4

Sources: Overseers Accounts } all five Parishes
 Burial Registers }

and seventy-five. This is displayed in Table 5.16. While it could be expected that some chronic sick and handicapped persons would be granted support at a relatively young age, it is surprising to find such a high percentage, between 15.0 per cent and 20.0 per cent remaining independent until over seventy-five years of age.

Women received a pension at a slightly lower age than men. The average age at which pensions were granted by the five parishes under study can be found in Table 5.17. This presents the male and female ages separately, together with the sex difference. Again there is very little difference between the parishes, Cranbrook being the poorest parish could have been expected to have been forced to keep their aged waiting longer for support. The fact that both men and women had pensions at younger ages suggests that prolonged poverty did have some effect on working capacity. Cranbrook women had pensions from two to five years younger than those in the other parishes. This may also be accounted for by the ever prevalent poverty, the difficulty the parish officers had in finding occupations for them, and as illustrated by the case of Katherine Sheaf⁽¹⁾, the necessity of keeping obviously sick women earning their keep. The remaining four parishes show little difference from each other, though Tonbridge did seem to grant women their pensions earlier than the rest.

Taken together, they show that on average, despite the

1. Appendix A.2 (8)

Table 5.17

TABLE SHOWING AGES AT WHICH PENSIONS
FIRST RECEIVED. BREAKDOWN BY YEARS

PARISH	UNDER 60 No. %	61 - 65 No. %	66 - 70 No. %	71 - 75 No. %	75 - 80 No. %	OVER 80 No. %
Cowden	8 (13.3)	15 (25.0)	15 (25.0)	9 (15.0)	6 (10.0)	7 (11.0)
Cranbrook	7 (5.0)	32 (23.0)	44 (31.7)	29 (20.9)	24 (17.3)	3 (2.1)
Maidstone	15 (9.8)	34 (22.2)	50 (32.7)	30 (19.6)	21 (13.7)	3 (2.1)
Tonbridge	20 (13.9)	39 (27.5)	32 (22.2)	31 (21.3)	12 (8.7)	10 (6.9)
Wrotham	11 (8.8)	31 (24.8)	32 (25.6)	33 (26.4)	10 (8.0)	8 (6.4)

Compiled from case histories and Overseers Accounts
for the five Parishes

hard life and poor diet, most of the very poor were capable of a long independent life, working about five years longer than the pensioners in the twentieth century.

The final table, Table 5.17, compares the average length that males remained on a pension before their demise with that of females, that is the length of the pension lives. In this respect the paupers of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries differ little from their present day counterparts. Women outlived men. While the length of pension lives obviously fluctuated from person to person, since the age of first receiving varied, some only lived a year or two, and others remained alive and dependent for many years. This undoubtedly imposed a considerable strain on parish resources.

Though the average pension lives shown in Table 5.18 seem reasonable, and the difference between males and females also moderate, the numbers conceal some extremely long lived individuals. Widow Elizabeth Clark of Cranbrook had received a pension for twenty-two years before her death in 1695 at the age of seventy-four.⁽¹⁾ She was a comparatively young woman when first a pensioner and was clearly handicapped in some way since she always shared a parish dwelling with another widow, and a very old man, the two women caring for him.⁽²⁾ As each occupant was receiving only a small pension, some work was obviously necessary to

1. K.A.O. TR/495/2-4 Cranbrook Burial Register Transcript
2. K.A.O. P100/12/2

Table 5.18

COMPARISON OF PENSION LIVES
MALES AND FEMALES (AVERAGES)

PARISH	1650 - 1700		1701 - 1750		1751 - 1800	
	MALES	FEMALES	MALES	FEMALES	MALES	FEMALES
Cowden	4.2	5.2	6.0	7.0	3.8	7.6
Cranbrook	5.6	7.1	4.0	5.3	3.0	3.0
Maidstone	5.0	8.4	6.5	7.3	3.8	5.1
Tonbridge	6.3	8.3	4.6	6.6	3.7	6.8
Wrotham	5.5	6.3	4.3	6.1	5.0	5.5

Compiled from case histories and Overseers Accounts
for the five Parishes

make ends meet. Since the overseers bought cards in 1682 it may be presumed that the two women were carding wool.

There were many widows who outlived their husbands by more than twenty years, parish pensioners for most of this time. The longest pension life that was discovered was that of Sarah Pinson of Tonbridge, widowed at sixty-four and surviving to the age of one hundred and five⁽¹⁾, a pensioner, therefore, for forty-one years. Though the workhouse was fully operational when her husband died in 1737, there is nothing in the surviving records to suggest that the parish ever contemplated sending her there. The reason may be that her son had died before his father so that the parish was able to place Sarah and her daughter together in the same almshouse where they lived together for forty years in apparent amity, and providing a much cheaper way out for the parish.⁽²⁾

Male pensioners seldom reached double figures in pension lives. In the first place, they first received pensions at a later age, showing a tendency to remain independent for far longer but, as with their counterparts today, they seem to show the same tendency of rapid deterioration, in many instances, once this independence was lost.⁽³⁾

The final section of this chapter will consider the role of 'setting on work'. This was an essential part of the

1. K.A.O. TR/2 451/1-2 Tonbridge Transcripts

2. K.A.O. P371/12/5

3. E. Shanahan et. al. Old People in Three Industrial Counties
London 1968 p.30

mechanism of the Old Poor Law, and it was incumbent upon all parishes to set their poor to labour according to their ability. Working is thus closely integrated with the pension, the latter rising or falling with the amount of work the pensioner was able to do. In the context of this study, only work initiated by the parish itself has been studied. But many pensioners will also have been working for private individuals and it has not been possible to assess the additional resources available to them.

SETTING ON WORK

There were considerable advantages to leaving the old in the community, in addition to the money dole being such a simple and convenient form of relief. Not only were many of them able to do many small tasks for themselves, such as cooking and sewing; weeding or chopping wood and tending a small garden, they might also be in a position to do these jobs as small favours for neighbours. They could also assist with minding a small child, or sit up with the sick, for all of which they might be recompensed in some way. The concept of work was an integral part of the philosophy of the Old Poor Law, and applied to the able old as well as to the able young.

The ability to do some form of paid work was closely related to the size of the pension, and was assessed at the first application to the Vestry. It should be said at the outset that except for certain specialised forms of paid work, such as parish nursing, the majority of parishes abandoned the principle of setting on work as soon as they

acquired a workhouse, transferring the work there. There were some, and Cranbrook must be included with these, who pursued the policy with vigour throughout the entire period. Most parishes seem to have reached the conclusion that the effort of making the old, with their poor sight and poor physique, earn small sums carding and spinning, to produce cloth of such poor quality as to be fit only for the coarsest of garments or even to be unuseable, not worth the result. The case of Katherine Sheaf has been considered, but there were many other Cranbrook widows who, though sick and frail, worked until within a few weeks of their death. One of these was Ann Drawbridge who was still spinning for the parish until one week before she died in March 1756 at the age of seventy-five.⁽¹⁾

Carding and spinning were probably the commonest forms of employment for old women. They were familiar domestic occupations, requiring little physical skill or mental effort. The defective vision of most of the old meant that they could only work with the coarsest flax or tow and the finished product was used only to clothe other paupers.⁽²⁾ Earnings of about sixpence or eightpence a week were the most that could be expected, and that only if work was regular. Widow Drawbridge, for example, earned only five shillings in the last twelve months of her life.⁽³⁾ Whether this was due to her frailty or to lack of work is difficult

1. K.A.O. P100/12/4; TR 495/2-4

2. K.A.O. P371/8/8 "John Mercer to have a shirt of parish stock"

3. K.A.O. P100/12/4

to say, for in the year of her demise Cranbrook parish only provided work to the value of thirty one pounds for all the able bodied and aged paupers together. An analysis of the expenditure for that year shows the struggle the officers had to meet their obligations. Pensions for the old came to just over one hundred and twenty pounds; rents paid came to thirty pounds. Thirty-three families claimed exemption from rent and rates on the grounds of poverty. Twenty-two empty shops meant a further loss. The amount received had risen from £350.0.0. in 1700 to £583.0.0. but in 1756 most of the increase was being expended in maintaining the workhouse, now overflowing.⁽¹⁾

In the same year, several Cranbrook pensioners were occupied in knitting stockings, an occupation not reserved solely for females. Widow Pullen was sewing clothes for parish orphans, while others were making shirts and shifts for the elderly occupants of the workhouse or other aged. They were paid threepence for making a shirt or shift and sixpence for knitting a pair of stockings. One or two of the more able pensioners could earn sixpence for a day's washing for the workhouse.⁽²⁾ In the other parishes these forms of casual work had already become the prerogative of workhouse inmates who were only paid twopence or threepence for each shilling's value placed on the finished product, and known as 'encouragement money'.⁽³⁾

1. K.A.O. P100/12/5

2. Ibid.

3. K.A.O. P241/11/7

There were a variety of ways in which pensioners could be employed by the parish on a long term basis. Widow Crampton has been noted as lodging Katherine Sheaf when the latter was no longer able to fend for herself.⁽¹⁾ Old Thomas Halfnett of Maidstone lodged with a Mother Prickett from 1715 until 1720, when he became one of the first inmates of the new workhouse.⁽²⁾ During these five years, old Halfnett, who was approaching eighty, received a pension of one shilling. His landlady nursed him from time to time for payment,⁽³⁾ and she received a weekly shilling for board and house room.

Tonbridge parish moved John Wynn into an almshouse with another pensioner, Widow Wood, in 1689 for £1.0.0. a year to include doing his washing, he himself receiving a pension of a shilling a week.⁽⁴⁾ Additional sums were paid out to the Widow from time to time 'for looking to him'. Such arrangements as were made for old Thomas Halfnett and old John Wynn illustrate the common practice in the parishes before the presence of a workhouse provided a partial solution of the accommodation problem, but a much more expensive one.

The doubling up of pensioners, one feeble lodging with a more able, who might or might not be a relative, for payment, was a common way of coping with solitaries who had no close family. Both the old men referred to above were

1. K.A.O. P100/12/1-2
2. K.A.O. P241/11/5
3. Ibid.
4. K.A.O. P371/12/2

alone in the world. There are no entries of any kind relating to them themselves, to wives or children, in the parish records.⁽¹⁾ It is very possible that they were bachelors, living as servants in husbandry and passed on to the parish when they were no longer capable of any work. The identification of John Wynn as being 'of Princes Style' a farm still in existence lends some support to the supposition.⁽²⁾ Resident servants from town establishments were also accommodated. William Curtis, a living-in servant at the Swan Inn, Maidstone was passed over to the parish when he became crippled in 1692, together with two pounds towards his keep. Henceforth he lodged with a Mother Ashpole.⁽³⁾

The practice of lodging one pensioner with another was just as common at the end of the period as it was before the workhouse period. It was economical and reasonably efficient. Parish accommodation was always in short supply and by adopting the system, savings could be made on rents, fuel and a return could be made on the outlay of the pension for the one acting as landlady. The money paid to Widow Wood, for example, in return for accommodating John Wynn, took the place of her pension. She herself was also getting on in years, for immediately on the death of John Wynn in

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1. Registers, All Saints Church, Maidstone
Transcripts Tonbridge Registers K.A.O. TR/ 2451/1-2
 2. K.A.O. P371/12/2
 3. K.A.O. P241/11/4

1701, she was granted a pension as "Thomas Wood's Widow".⁽¹⁾

It is logical to assume, also, that except where the lodger was sick, lame or decrepit, as well as aged, as with Thomas Halfnett, that the arrangement would be a two way process, the lodger performing such essential tasks as collecting and chopping wood, even tending a small garden. Lodging in this sense was much more common for men than for women. Two old women, either widows or spinsters, often two sisters, or mother and daughter, might share an almshouse quite amicably for a number of years but seemed to live a separate existence. They received everything separately, pensions, fuel allocation, even their separate share of a distribution from a charity. It must be assumed that there would be a considerable amount of co-operation of one kind or another but where aged women were found in the position of lodgers in a subordinate state, they were either too old and sick to take care of themselves, or they were living with a son or daughter who was being paid for the service. George Fishenden provided a home for his mother-in-law Elizabeth Heath from 1708 to 1730, when she entered Tonbridge workhouse to die a few months later. Her biographical details provided a rare example of the tightening up of pensions that followed the opening of a workhouse, since few pensioners survived the initial sweep

1. K.A.O. P371/12/2. Estimated from the date of her marriage to William Wood that she was between 74 and 78 when she died in 1708, seven years after Wynn. Ref. K.A.O. TR 2451/1-2

of inmates. From 1708, Fishenden had received five shillings a month, sometimes six. After 1726 it fell to four shillings, at which level it remained.⁽¹⁾ Similarly, Jane Hollands, a Cowden pensioner for eight years from 1728 to 1736, boarded with her son-in-law John Plant, during which time she earned part of her keep preparing herbal medicines which were used to treat other poor.⁽²⁾

The active old frequently became foster parents to parish orphans. Long term fostering was often on behalf of their own grandchildren. John Lane of Tonbridge was paid six shillings a month, from April 1678, to keep his grandchild Rose Couchman. When he died a year later, his widow continued to foster the girl until she was apprenticed in 1684 at the age of fourteen.⁽³⁾

Old Goodman John Terry and his wife, of Maidstone, were given two shillings weekly to foster their grandson Thomas from 1733 to 1737. It seems probable that the fostering would have continued but for the fact that all three were infected with smallpox in 1735. The two old folk, in their late sixties at the time, never regained their health but the grandson remained with them until 1737 when he disappeared from the records, presumably to begin work.⁽⁴⁾

Parishes also boarded out children with the old on a short term basis, some elderly being able to make a

1. K.A.O. P371/12/2-3
2. K.A.O. P99/12/2
3. K.A.O. P371/12/1
4. K.A.O. P241/11/6-7

reasonable living by this means. The children involved were those of sick paupers, especially where it was the mother that was sick or having another child. Occasionally the parish would board out the children of a widower, so that he could continue to earn his living and it was not unknown for one member of a large family to be boarded out or removed to the workhouse because the family could not survive otherwise. Some care seems to have been taken to see that it was the older children of a family that were removed in this way.

In 1671, Tonbridge parish paid old Andrew Latter four guineas for keeping "Mrs. Cronks' children for a year"⁽¹⁾ while she had a prolonged sickness.

Old Richard Watchers was already a pensioner of Maidstone, and a grandfather, when he married his second wife Ann in 1684. There seems to have been no comment about the disparity in their ages, and it is likely that the new wife was partially supporting her aged husband, since his pension was now cut by half from two shillings to one shilling a week. No details of Ann's previous life have been found, but it seems probable that she was a widow with small children, for when smallpox struck the family in 1688, the parish records mention five victims, including three children. The wife died, leaving her aged husband, now well over seventy, to support the three children who survived, who may or may not have been his. Since this was out of the

1. K.A.O. P371/12/1

question, they were taken over by the parish and boarded out among other poor people glad enough to earn some additional money.⁽¹⁾

Orphan children remained a costly burden to the parish officers long after the opening of a workhouse, and despite the fact that in many workhouses anything from two thirds to three quarters of the places were taken up by children.⁽²⁾ Parishes did not necessarily keep the children in their home parish. Widow Betts, an out-pensioner of Cowden and living by arrangement in Battle, Sussex, was made to take in the two children of her deceased son, Saunders, again with the agreement of the local officers. Cowden parish paid the Battle overseers three pounds five shillings annually for these two children in addition to paying for their clothes for three years. In 1763, one either died or began to work and for the next five years, Cowden paid only twenty five shillings a year. In 1768, all payments to both grandmother and grandson ceased, so it is difficult to decide whether the grandmother died, and the young lad was apprenticed, or, since the Cowden workhouse was opened in that year for the first time, both were brought 'home'.⁽³⁾

The tasks at which women were employed by the parish could be, and were, over a much wider field than the traditionally domestic occupations of knitting, sewing, carding and spinning. The Tonbridge Churchwardens regularly

1. K.A.O. P241/11/2-3

2. See Chapter on The Role of the Workhouse

3. K.A.O. P99/12/2

employed pensioners to wash the surplices and other church linen; to mend them as necessary; to scour the plate and to weed the paths.⁽¹⁾ In addition to the above tasks, the Cranbrook Churchwardens employed eight old women, not always the same ones, to clean the church each three months.⁽²⁾ Old women have been found receiving payment for bark stripping, helping with hop harvests, with haymaking and fruit picking. As the eighteenth century progressed, most of the work passed to the workhouse inmates in a desperate effort to keep down costs, so that any female pensioner remaining outside, had to rely on her pension and relief in kind for survival, on charity and on various forms of self help.

Finding some work for male pensioners was a much less onerous task for the overseers. In the first place they were a much smaller group and they were often able to continue at their customary work, though at a slower pace and for less wages. In many instances, therefore, all the parish needed to do was to 'top up' the wages by paying the rent or by some other means. Paul Praull, a widower for thirty years, who had also outlived both his children, rented a cottage on Peach Hall Farm, Tonbridge, where he worked as a labourer. He died in 1679, aged 76. He clearly had been able to find sufficient work to keep himself in food and clothing since the parish only supplemented these by payment of his rent for the last eight years of his life.⁽³⁾ Old Edmund

1. K.A.O. P371/5/1-2

2. K.A.O. P100/5/1-3

3. K.A.O. P371/12/2. TR 2451/1-2

Missingham of Cranbrook received a pension of only sixpence a week for the thirteen years before his death at the age of eighty-one. The occasional purchase of clothing, a new spade from time to time and the payment of his rent in the latter years of his life proved sufficient maintenance.⁽¹⁾ The purchase of tools was a common entry in all account books, from spades and sickles to hoes and other tools needed for the common tasks of agriculture such as weeding, hoeing, hedging and ditching, to more specialised tools and materials for craft work as, for example, pieces of leather and awls for shoemakers; repairs for spinning wheels.⁽²⁾

It has already been noticed that men spent shorter periods as non-employed pensioners than women. This is not only because men found it easier to get sufficient casual work, but they seldom lived as solitaries, and parishes seemed much readier to place them into the workhouse, where they frequently were able to continue their craft or another kind of occupation. Old John Taylor, shoemaker, had also been the town scavenger of Maidstone until he became too old in 1770. The parish then set him up in a small way to mend shoes for the workhouse inmates. He could only keep it up for a matter of three years when he had to be admitted to the workhouse himself, where he continued to repair shoes until his death in 1782, being over eighty years of age.⁽³⁾

James Carr, parish coffin maker and odd job carpenter

1. K.A.O. P100/12/1-2

2. K.A.O. P371/12/2; P100/12/3; P241/11/4

3. K.A.O. P241/11/8

to Cowden parish, took his carpentry tools with him into the workhouse in 1800, where he continued to make coffins when necessary and carried out minor repairs to the furniture.⁽¹⁾

Tonbridge parish rented three acres of ground in the vicinity of the workhouse which was turned into an orchard and garden, mainly to supply the house. Under the control of the Master, boys were taught gardening and several old men assisted him or kept hogs, also to feed the inmates.⁽²⁾

The Poor Law policy behind the 'setting on work' was two fold; it utilised the labour of both young and old poor in the care and attendance of sick and dependent old; it also formed part of the philosophy of making the old support themselves while they could. The nursing care of the old has already received some attention. To close this section on 'work', it will be discussed from the point of view of the pensioner herself, taking Ann Welsh of Cranbrook as a typical example of many. She was second wife of William Welsh, a cripple, partly supported by the parish. When she married Welsh in 1692 she had already been married once and had a young son. Welsh died in 1697, leaving her a widow for the second time. As her son was too young to be set to work, the parish paid them both a pension for a year until the boy was eleven and old enough to be apprenticed.⁽³⁾

In 1699 the parish officers moved Ann Welsh into joint accommodation with a crippled spinster, Elizabeth Leigh,

1. K.A.O. P99/12/2

2. K.A.O. P371/12/4-5

3. K.A.O. P100/12/1-2; TR 495/2-4

whom she was to 'tend'. Her previous experience in assisting a crippled husband would have been valuable in these new circumstances. In spite of their perennial financial difficulties, Cranbrook treated her well; a pension of five shillings in her own right each month, two and six for her nursing duties, and the customary perquisites of free housing, fuel and occasional purchases of clothing.⁽¹⁾ She had now an assured status in the parish which lasted until the death of Elizabeth Leigh in 1714. It would be a satisfying discovery to find out whether she made any provision for the future during these lucrative years but it seems unlikely.

Ann's companion was seventy on her death in 1714⁽²⁾ after which Ann was given rent free lodgings in the town, her pension and gifts in kind were continued. Periodic assignments to nurse the sick were available and she continued reasonably comfortable until the parish opened their workhouse in 1723 and she suffered a drastic reversal of fortunes. She was now in her fifties.

When the workhouse was opened it must be presumed that she was offered a place there with her actual and potential patients, but she must have refused. Her work ceased, and her pension ceased. For the next seven years she obviously led a hand to mouth existence for she appeared from time to time in the overseers accounts as being 'in want' and

1. K.A.O. P100/12/2-3; TR 495/2-4
2. K.A.O. P100/12/3-5
3. K.A.O. TR 495/2-4

receiving small sums of casual relief. In 1730 the parish arranged for her to live with and to nurse her old father William Boorman, very aged and discharged from the workhouse. This continued until the old man's demise in 1736.⁽¹⁾

Ann Welsh was now sixty-eight years of age, had been a widow for thirty-nine, and had cared for the old and sick of Cranbrook for most of that time. Cranbrook did not place her on its pension list again and she vanished from the records. It is not known whether she went to live with her son, and there is no record of her being buried in Cranbrook.⁽²⁾ She seemed to have been abandoned when her usefulness was over.

This is in contrast to the practice in Maidstone where such long service to the community was recognised by a slightly higher pension⁽³⁾ or in Tonbridge where such women were never sent to the workhouse but found reasonably comfortable lodgings, until the demands of their age required more assistance than the householder was able to give.⁽⁴⁾

The uncertainty of what happened to and how Widow Welsh managed to survive with no work and no pension for seven years, only falling below subsistence level occasionally and then being forced on to the parish, raises a widespread problem which requires some attention. There was an apparent

1. K.A.O. TR 495/2-4

2. K.A.O. P100/12/3-5; TR 495/2-4

3. K.A.O. P241/11/1; P241/11/4

4. K.A.O. P371/12/5-6

gap in the provision for the aged, between that given by the parish and that provided by the family and by charity. Many fell 'through the net' and remained close to starvation during periodic tightening up of relief measures, due to refusal enter the workhouses. Others were forced to supplement their pensions and gifts to reach a reasonable subsistence level without parish work. They do not seem to have starved and clearly survived by other means; this has been called 'self help'. In the present context it will be discussed with the other measures lying partly outside the parish treatment, with Charity and the role of the family.

This chapter has been confined to discussion and analysis of the parish pension, and the ways by which pensioners could supplement this by performing paid work for the parish. There were other ways by which the transference of money from Vestry to aged pauper took place. These must be regarded as casual and ameliorating payments, made to relieve the pensioner of sudden extra demands. A sudden deterioration of health curtailing the capacity to work or leading to increased demand for money to pay for medicines, better food or for attention, is an obvious example. There are several such references in the Appendix of Case Histories. Money was also provided to repair working tools, or to replace them, to get clothes out of pawn, or to meet any particular need of any particular individual. Such payments are too diverse to quantify.

During the course of the eighteenth century, the

pension was in large measure replaced by the use of the workhouse to house and care for the aged. While the new system was, at the time of the Act of 1723⁽¹⁾ regarded as solving the problem of the increasing expense of Poor Relief, the next chapter, which analyses the role of the workhouse in the treatment of the aged, will show that it also had its problems.

1. 9 Geo. I. c7 (1722-1723)

CHAPTER SIX - THE ROLE OF THE WORKHOUSE IN THE TREATMENT OF THE AGED

Introductory

Much has been written down the years about the part played by the workhouse in the relief of the poor, and especially among the old. This prominence makes it unnecessary to go over old ground, discussing in detail the rise of the workhouse movement in the late seventeenth century, and the final adoption of such institutions as an integral part of poor relief programmes following the passing of Knatchbull's General Workhouse Act in 1722.⁽¹⁾ Despite their notoriety, less than two hundred workhouses were actually built in the eighteenth century, and a somewhat higher number of large and small habitations hired and converted for the purpose. The total number provided covered only a fraction of the fifteen thousand English parishes.⁽²⁾ Their role and their importance must, therefore, have been less extensive than has been formerly supposed but, as most Kent parishes adopted the workhouse system, including all five parishes concerned in this study, their role is likely to be of significance in this present context.

To avoid confusion: by the word 'workhouse' is meant an institution which served both as a place of residence and as a place of work for paupers. Separate quarters could be

1. 9 Geo. I. c.7. (1722-1723)

2. C. Wilson. England's Apprenticeship. London 1965. p 350

provided within such structures for special categories of paupers, such as the sick or the old, but these distinctions were not always carried out in practice. Work was an essential part of the ethos and was to be performed by all those capable of it, young and old. This definition contrasts sharply with a 'poorhouse' which is a residence only, mostly for the old, and no work was expected. The structures which came into use under Gilbert's Act of 1781, were strictly speaking poorhouses.⁽¹⁾ No West Kent parish adopted this act so that the distinction does not arise.

Workhouse records for the parishes in question have survived only fragmentarily, and in these the old are seldom clearly identifiable. If they had spent some time as out-pensioners previously their transfer to the 'House' is occasionally noted in the accounts. Some simply disappear not to be found again until their names appear some months or years later in the parish Burial Register. During their time in the workhouse for the most part they become part of the numerical statistics; admissions, discharges, weekly or monthly totals, or burials. They are not mentioned by name unless they receive some particular treatment which was not routine, such as medicines, special diets or treats such as a weekly quart of strong beer.⁽²⁾ Discussion of the role of the workhouse with reference to the old has thus to be conducted in a general manner and assumptions about their treatment inferred from the available evidence.

1. 22 Geo. III. c.83 (1781-1782)
2. K.A.O. P241/12/34

No serious enquiry into the place occupied by the workhouses in the framework of relief measures has been carried out since the early years of this century.⁽¹⁾ This study is primarily concerned with their relationship to one group of paupers but it may be opportune to reconsider their function in general, not only because they were not as widespread as they were formerly thought to be, but the Commissioners of 1834, in their belief that they were making universal the best functioning elements of the Old Poor Law, made the workhouses the core of their new system.⁽²⁾ The local evidence casts some doubt on this assumption.

The workhouse system became widespread in West Kent, almost every parish either building a purpose designed structure or converting a large existing capital messuage to a new use. New workhouses were very costly. Thomas Bliss, a former mayor, provided Maidstone with a large three storied workhouse at his own expense in 1720 at a cost of £900. The parish furnished it for £500.⁽³⁾ When full it could house 160 paupers.⁽⁴⁾

Whether they built or hired premises, the parishes soon found themselves involved in new responsibilities for which they were often ill prepared. Many mistakes were made both in organisation and in management which had repercussions on the inmates. Leasing premises often turned out to be

1. S. & B. Webb. op. cit. pp 253-260

2. S. G. & E. O. Checkland (eds). Poor Law Report of 1834.
Penguin edition 1974. Introduction p 38

3. Russell. Maidstone. op. cit. p 379

4. Ibid. p 379

disastrous. Those that were available at a reasonable rent were old and unable to withstand the hard usage a workhouse entailed. They required constant repair and adaptation.⁽¹⁾ Landlords frequently refused to renew leases, resulting in a search for new premises and the upheaval of the whole community.⁽²⁾

Managing a community of people of all ages was a skill that had to be learned by long and sometimes bitter experience for both the governor and the governed. Careful examination of the names which disappeared from the overseers accounts in the months immediately following the opening of the Maidstone and Cranbrook workhouses, in 1720 and 1723, show the earliest inmates to have been a hotch-potch of aged, sick, mentally and physically handicapped, orphans and unmarried mothers with their offspring, but very few of those able bodied who were intended to do the work that would make the institution self-supporting.⁽³⁾

Day to day administration was controlled by a Vestry committee, through a Master, Governor or a Mistress, or the entire workhouse was contracted out to an apparently competent person or persons who agreed to manage the whole operation at mutually agreed rates.⁽⁴⁾ Neither system was satisfactory in the early years. There were constant changes

1. K.A.O. P99/12/2

2. K.A.O. P406/12/6-7; K.A.O. P99/12/2

3. K.A.O. P241/11/5; K.A.O. P100/12/4-5

4. K.A.O. P99/12/2. During the first twenty years of its existence, the Cowden Workhouse was managed by a Vestry Committee, two different contractors, two supervisors on an annual basis. A permanent Governor was not appointed until 1784.

from one type of management to the other; constant changes of policy as parishes strove in vain to make the system economic or to find suitable personnel to take charge.⁽¹⁾

As institutions, the eighteenth century workhouses have been interpreted as having an inherent tendency to cruelty and perversion because of the mixture of objectives conferred upon them under the law; profitable employment for the poor, a deterrent, penal establishment, an asylum for the old and impotent and orphanage.⁽²⁾ There does not seem to be any surviving evidence in the West Kent documents to support this charge. But cruelty is not necessarily confined to beating, starving, theft or any other physical means. It may well result from lack of proper control, an absence of comfort and kindness, unsuitable diet and a too rigid discipline. These may well have been widespread in the early workhouses and constitute an element of cruelty in the treatment of the aged inmates who cannot tolerate such an environment for long, without deteriorating mentally and physically. These early weaknesses were not overcome for twenty or thirty years, by which time Vestries had gained experience about their proper administration, about the right type of Governor or contractor, and many parishes had come to the conclusion that the workhouse was not the best place to house the aged pensioner anyway.

Much stress was laid on the importance of work in these early workhouses. Those who could were expected to work full

1. K.A.O. P406/12/7; K.A.O. P100/12/6; P99/12/2

2. S. & B. Webb. op. cit. pp 215-250

time, producing goods for sale. Much of the work was related to the cloth industry. There was the usual weaving, carding and spinning. The inmates of the Wrotham workhouse made up hop bags, canvas satchels for the military, ticking, coal sacks, cordage, floor mats, twine and tarpaulin. The more skilled made fine fabrics like shirting, sheeting and damask.⁽¹⁾ Those who possessed craft skills continued to use them for the benefit of the 'House'. Many old men continued with their trades of shoemaking and mending, tailoring, carpentry, glazing and masonry.⁽²⁾ Others worked in local farms, sometimes regularly, sometimes during busy times such as haymaking or harvest. Other old men kept pigs or worked in the gardens, often acting as instructors to some of the male orphans. Those old women still capable of work were occupied in a variety of ways. They helped with cleaning, cooking, baking, brewing; washing, sewing, and mending. They nursed the sick or looked after the babies and young children. The more able went out to help with fruit picking, haymaking, corn and hop harvests.⁽³⁾

Whoever acted in a supervisory capacity over this motley crowd would need exceptional ability to be both efficient and economical. There were few such persons available in the early decades of the eighteenth century, so that the fact that they were so badly run should not be surprising. The real cruelty came with the over-riding

1. K.A.O. P406/12/16

2. Anon. An Account of Several Workhouses. London 1725
Letter from a Gentleman from Maidstone. p 18

3. Ibid. p 19

philosophy that massive savings would result which meant that economy and pressure to become a 'production unit' took priority over all other considerations.

As parishes opened their new workhouses the pension lists disappeared from the overseers' accounts. In Cranbrook all the poor in receipt of regular relief were swept into the new building until it was full to overflowing.⁽¹⁾ Tonbridge, Maidstone and Wrotham, and later Cowden, seem to have made the deliberate decision to leave some of the aged to continue as out-pensioners.⁽²⁾ No obvious criteria of selection have been found but, as all the new workhouses were small in comparison to the local populations and, therefore, soon filled, it is reasonable to suppose that a competent pensioner, possibly in lodgings and unlikely to become part of any profitable occupation, would be just as well left alone. Though the law of 1722 stated that no relief was to be given to any outside the house, no kind of penalty was set out against any parish which continued to give out relief, and customary pragmatic solutions to individual cases continued. Named individuals in receipt of both casual relief and pensions continued to appear in the accounts of the four parishes.⁽³⁾ Cowden did not resort to a workhouse until 1768.⁽⁴⁾

Pension lists made their reappearance in all the parish accounts within a few years. By 1727, seven years after

1. K.A.O. P100/12/3. It was intended to hold 50 persons

2. K.A.O. P241/11/5; P371/12/4; P406/12/3; P99/12/2

3. Ibid.

4. K.A.O. P99/12/2

opening its workhouse, Maidstone had a pension list of thirty aged.⁽¹⁾ The accounts for Tonbridge are fragmentary for the years surrounding the opening of the workhouse, but by 1731, five years later, there are at least ten.⁽²⁾ Many of Cranbrook's admissions were soon discharged and by 1730, eight years after the opening, the pension list was again fully in being.⁽³⁾

This is indicative of rapid loss of enthusiasm for the workhouse as a means of treating the aged, and several reasons can be put forward. In the first place, the expected economies in the poor rates lasted for only a year or two. Separate workhouse accounts have not survived well since most expenses were included in the general accounts. Tonbridge, however, kept them separately and the attached table of yearly expenditure shows the increasing burden the workhouse posed to the parish.

In 1714/1715, the last year for which complete accounts are available before the workhouse was built, the disbursements were £676.⁽⁴⁾ Those for 1731, the first year after the parish had finished paying the instalments on the new building, they were £318.⁽⁵⁾ Nine years later, total disbursements, which included workhouse expenditure, were back to £600. Thereafter, except for years when exceptional efforts were made to cut poor relief, the disbursements

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1. K.A.O. P241/11/6
 2. K.A.O. P371/12/4
 3. K.A.O. P100/12/3
 4. K.A.O. P371/12/3
 5. K.A.O. P371/12/4

Table 6.1

ANNUAL COST TONBRIDGE WORKHOUSE COMPARED WITH
TOTAL ANNUAL DISBURSEMENTS (1731 - 1760)

YEAR	WORKHOUSE EXPENSES (£)	TOTAL DISBURSEMENTS (£)	%	COMMENTS
				Opened 1726 paying cost of building to 1730
1731	264	318	83.0	}
1732	198	320	61.9	} High proportion
1733	188	311	60.5	} aged in W/H
1734	185	386	47.9	
1735	219	316	69.3	
1736	262	380	68.9	
1737	267	408	65.4	
1738	272	429	63.4	
1739	303	421	71.9	
1740	343	620	55.3	
1741	349	793	44.0	
1742	273	573	47.6	
1743	286	470	60.8	
1744	248	476	52.1	
1745	278	488	57.0	
1746	299	555	53.9	}
1747	272	596	45.6	} Small pox
1748	281	616	45.6	}
1749	284	493	57.6	
1750	285	517	55.1	
1751	316	495	63.8	
1752	305	440	69.3	All aged poor in W/H
1753	344	532	64.7	
1754	310	542	57.1	
1755	301	549	54.8	
1756	356	710	50.1	
1757	465	749	62.1	
1758	454	682	66.6	
1759	480	784	61.2	
1760	444	784	56.6	W/H full
1765		909		
1770	No	1116		
1775	separate	1509		
1780	accounts	1580		
1785		1880		
1790		2149		

continued to rise reaching £1,000 by 1760. The cost of running the workhouse alone, which was £364 in 1731, had doubled by 1760.⁽¹⁾ There was no increase in the number of inmates to account for this.⁽²⁾

Workhouses were ubiquitous in Kent, and consequently played an important part in the treatment of the old. It seems to have been accepted by all that the new project would save money, but new costs make their appearance almost immediately. Using Maidstone as an illustration, the pattern of new expenditure can be analysed. Firstly, there were the new staff wages; the Governor in Maidstone, elsewhere it might have been a contractor; the cook and, from time to time, maids, people to do the washing, baking; nurses; occasionally someone was paid to teach the children to read, knit, sew and spin. Whereas formerly some of the old cultivated small plots, or earned a little money by working, or even received gifts of food or money, the parish now had to shoulder the entire cost of maintenance. With three meals a day and meat for the main meal, the cost of feeding them alone outweighed the pensions.⁽³⁾

Keeping up the fabric of the workhouse was a much more expensive matter than patching up thatched almshouses, though it is significant that none of the existing almshouses were demolished. They continued in use as before.⁽⁴⁾ A

1. K.A.O. P371/12/4-5

2. Tonbridge & Malling Borough Archives. Document No.A 169
K.A.O. P371/12/24

3. K.A.O. P241/12/12-34

4. K.A.O. P241/11/6,7,8

crowded community, with a large number of children, subjected the building to considerable stress, and the accounts start to contain regular payments to carpenters, glaziers, bricklayers.⁽¹⁾ The food bills were also very high. Many of the early vouchers survive for Maidstone and Wrotham but local tradesmen do not seem to be overcharging since their prices compared favourably with those mentioned by historians who have studied the subject.⁽²⁾

Set against this increasing expenditure must be placed some savings on out-relief, but the main point of the exercise, which was to make the whole of poor relief self supporting, was a dismal failure for the first half century. In 1722, Maidstone inmates earned just over seven pounds teasing tow and making hop bags,⁽³⁾ and little more in the following two decades. The rest of the population contributed to this failure since they took every opportunity to exploit the labour themselves. Young able bodied males and females were employed by them doing all kinds of work, both farming and domestic. Having set the daily wage themselves at twopence, there was no possibility of making any profit.⁽⁴⁾ The situation became more realistic in time, locals paying a shilling a day of which the worker received twopence or threepence.

Escalation of costs were just as apparent elsewhere. By

1. K.A.O. P241/11/6,7,8

2. Thorold Rogers. A History of Agriculture and Prices.
London 1866-1902. Vols. 6 & 7 cover this period

3. K.A.O. P241/11/6-8

4. K.A.O. P241/11/7

1733 the outgoings of the Cranbrook workhouse had reached £317, a rise of fifty per cent over 1723, while the inmates contributed earnings of almost nine pounds.⁽¹⁾ Such persistently poor earnings led most parishes to abandon the idea of profitable labour and learned to save money by using the work capacity of those inmates who could work for the benefit of the House itself, or as cost cutting exercises. Tonbridge rented a nearby orchard and garden of three acres, using the work of boys and old men, and selling the surplus produce.⁽²⁾ Cowden and Wrotham found plenty of opportunity for the able bodied to work on surrounding farms and made little effort to become productive.⁽³⁾ It may be reasoned that this initial disappointment may have led to the constant changes in administration that have been already noted, as the parish officers struggled in vain to cut costs and make the expected profit.

Following close on the heels of the dismal economics of the system, there occurred in most workhouses what can only be described as catastrophe. Within a few years of their opening, there developed in the majority of workhouses of any size a rapidly spreading, highly contagious disease, of unknown origin, but rapidly fatal to the aged inmates. The glowing account written by John Cary of the successful Bristol workhouse experiment of 1696, and which had given

1. K.A.O. P100/12/4
2. K.A.O. P371/12/4-6
3. K.A.O. P99/12/2; P406/12/7

such a tremendous filip to the whole movement, contained no mention of the outbreak of fever which had occurred in the same year and had spread outside the confines of the establishment to involve the town itself with a large number of fatalities. In the then state of medical knowledge, no one would have connected the crowding together of large numbers of people into one building, to work, eat and sleep as anything to do with an outbreak of fever.⁽¹⁾ The aetiology of the outbreaks of 'workhouse fevers' was not worked out until the mammoth investigations of Sir Charles Creighton in the late nineteenth century.⁽²⁾

The course of the infection in Maidstone can be traced in some detail. It made its first appearance in 1724, took eighteen months to run its course, during which there were thirty deaths, many of them among the old. It returned again in 1727 with a mortality of fifty-five. There were nine deaths in 1728 and a final eighteen over the next two years as the epidemic died away. From the burial records and the incomplete information supplied by the overseer's accounts, it has been estimated that at least half of these hundred and twelve deaths were of people over sixty who had been moved to the workhouse during the first flush of enthusiasm.⁽³⁾

A similar outbreak affected Cranbrook from 1724 to 1726, again decimating the older inmates, a fact which did

1. J. Cary. Account of the Proceedings of the Corporation of the Poor of Bristol. Bristol 1696. pp 11, 17

2. Creighton. op. cit. Vol II. p 445

3. K.A.O. P241/11/6; Burial Registers, All Saints, 1720-1730

not go unnoticed by the incumbent who was moved to note in the register in December 1724 that he found it most unusual to bury three old men on the same day.⁽¹⁾ There is no evidence available for the other three parishes. The records are missing for Tonbridge. Cowden did not have a workhouse until 1768, when presumably improvements had been made, while Wrotham at least had provided an old people's room, an infirmary and never had more than a quarter to a third of its inmates in the old age bracket.⁽²⁾ Though the evidence is slight, there was a recognition that there was a predisposition to periodic outbreaks of this fever in the eighteenth century workhouse, and was a cause of a higher mortality among the aged inmates throughout the century. The Rev. D. Davis, writing as late as 1797, drew attention not only to their great expense, but also to the great mortality within the houses.⁽³⁾

It is quite likely that this constant exposure to infection, together with the unexpected failure to become economically self sufficient, were stimuli to the reappearance of pensioners within a few years.

Overcrowding may well have been a factor in the liability to outbreaks of disease and further stimulated the move towards the return of out-pensioners. Hygiene, sanitary arrangements and ignorance may have been equally important. Attempts were made by the parishes to combat the dangers in

1. K.A.O. P100/12/3. K.A.O. TR 2451/2
2. K.A.O. P406/12/26; K.A.O. TR 1303-1305
3. D. Davis. op. cit. p 83

their own way. They all ultimately made contracts with local physicians, who applied such knowledge as they had to lessening the danger. The sick were isolated and nursed in special rooms, and efforts were made to improve the standards of cleanliness. It was, however, the environment itself that constituted the greatest danger to the aged, and with the return of the old to out-relief, it is fair to conclude that the officers realised that not only was it a great deal more expensive to keep the aged in the workhouse, but it was also far more dangerous.

In the next section, this environment will be given close attention.

THE WORKHOUSE ENVIRONMENT

Parish pensioners in our particular parishes tend to 'disappear' once they enter the workhouse. Evaluating their treatment consists of interpreting what might have been the case from fragmentary documentation, together with a process of analogy from what took place in other parishes in the West Kent region.

It has been argued that the workhouse was not the best of places in which to relieve the old. It cannot be argued conclusively that contemporary Vestries also came to realise this fact, and that this was the cause for the early reappearance of out-pensioners lists. It could also have been the result of workhouses rapidly filling. What is clear, however, is that parishes gradually adopted the custom that no aged person was sent to a workhouse until his or her circumstances were discussed in open Vestry after other forms of relief had first been tried out. Just as granting a pension had been, so sending a pensioner to the workhouse became a collective decision of the parish, except in emergency.

In October 1768, the Tonbridge Vestry considered the case of old, deaf, John Knight. He had been allowed casual relief in the past but now, with a double hernia, his earning capacity was even more reduced and he had a wife to keep who was handicapped in some way, but it is not known how. The parish agreed to pay his rent, to allow him clothing as and when necessary, as well as the odd bushel

of wheat.⁽¹⁾ His wife, Judith, was never mentioned either then or during the following two years. In 1771 the decision was taken to admit Knight to the workhouse, 'he being past labour'.⁽²⁾ By estimation from the parish registers, he would have been well over seventy.⁽³⁾ His wife, who was five years younger, was to be admitted at the same time. John Knight had clearly reached the end of the road before admission for he died four months later. His wife survived for nine more years.⁽⁴⁾

Maidstone differed somewhat in its procedure. Each new overseer, as soon as possible after his appointment, made a circuit of his ward accompanied by a constable. They searched all likely dwellings looking for non-settled residents and examining their certificates, while at the same time searching out the paupers and assessing their needs. Their recommendations would be discussed at a general meeting headed by the Mayor. A collective decision was again taken as to who should be taken into the workhouse.⁽⁵⁾ Being a large overcrowded town, Maidstone probably needed an annual 'sweep' of this nature to keep the numbers under control.

Cranbrook reinforced its Vestry decision by obtaining a Justice's order before removing a pensioner to the workhouse.⁽⁶⁾ There is no evidence as to why this should be

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1. K.A.O. P371/8/8
 2. Ibid.
 3. K.A.O. TR 2451/1-2
 4. K.A.O. P371/8/8; TR 1451/1-2
 5. K.A.O. P241/11/5-7
 6. K.A.O. P100/12/3

so, except that there were legal provisions in existence and these were incorporated into Canterbury's Private Act⁽¹⁾ that no ancient person should be compelled to go into the workhouse against his will.

The following examples must serve as illustrations of the belief that, after the first few years, removal to a workhouse was a matter for the whole Vestry and was not resorted to until the last moment.

Old Thomas How, of Cranbrook, was described as being 'in want' in 1727, 1728 and in 1729. He would have been about seventy at this time, and had a wife, his second, whom he was probably trying to support. The parish did not obtain a warrant for his removal to the House until November 1730, where he died in June of the following year.⁽²⁾

Nathanial Rachell, of Tonbridge, said in 1763 to be 'very Old, of great age and in distress' was not sent to the workhouse for another four years at the age of eighty six.⁽³⁾

Old James Ongley, a Maidstone pensioner, survived in the workhouse for only a year, dying at the age of eighty five in 1743. His wife Joan, admitted at the same time, survived for another five years.⁽⁴⁾

These few examples also indicate how short a time many men were actually spending in the workhouse. Their wives, it would seem, were better able to adapt to the new

1. I. Geo. II. 20.20. Complete Parish Officer. op. cit. p230
2. K.A.O. P100/12/3
3. K.A.O. P371/12/5; K.A.O. TR 1451/2-4
4. K.A.O. P241/11/6 Burial Register. All Saints, Maidstone

environment.

Documents giving the rules or accounts of conditions at various periods of time have not survived for the parishes in question. There are such documents for workhouses in other parts of West Kent; rules, impressionistic accounts by visitors and fragmentary day to day accounts.⁽¹⁾ Any picture of the treatment of the aged in our specific workhouses must be built up from a number of sources, and the conclusions reached can, therefore, only be tentative.

It is fairly safe to deduce to begin with that the number of old in any workhouse at any one time was likely to be small, not more than a third of the total number of inmates.⁽²⁾

The account of Strood workhouse in the 1720's, enumerated a 'few' old men, with little to do, living comfortably and having the use of the infirmary and an apothecary. There were also several old women, including one over ninety and blind, all of whom occupied their time knitting and sewing.⁽³⁾

In the same year, 1725, the old in Maidstone workhouse were said to be doing such work as their age and strength allowed.⁽⁴⁾ They were not expected to work at all after the age of seventy. Old Brunger, one of the first of its

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1. An Account of Several Workhouses;
K.A.O. P110/12/7 Dartford Workhouse
 2. K.A.O. P157/8/1 Goudhust. P371/12/15 Tonbridge
Wrotham K.A.O. P406/12/31-32, 36, 39.
 3. H. Smetham. History of Strood. Rochester 1899 p 273
quoting Churdwardens Accounts and Account of Several Workhouses.
 4. An Account of etc. p 18-19

inmates, was allowed pocket money of sixpence a week, 'having no work on account of age'. His age was estimated to be eighty-one when he died in 1730, so he was likely to qualify for the pocket money on his arrival.⁽¹⁾ There is no evidence as to whether the practice of giving the old men a small dole was general throughout the region but giving them a weekly ounce of tobacco and an extra quart of beer seems to have been very common.⁽²⁾

Some of the old inmates continued to work until they were well past seventy. John Taylor, taken into Maidstone in 1777 at the age of seventy-one, continued his cobbler's business from the House for another four years, handing over to the authorities tenpence in every shilling that he earned.⁽³⁾

James Carr, admitted to the Cowden workhouse in 1800 at the age of eighty-one, continued to work as parish carpenter though confined to performing the less onerous tasks.⁽⁴⁾

A variety of other occupations has already been mentioned and it seems likely that these very old men worked as much voluntarily as by compulsion. None worked for nothing. The custom of giving twopence for every shilling earned grew up with the workhouse as 'encouragement money'. Later it acquired the force of law.⁽⁵⁾

For most of the eighteenth century, parishes seemed

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1. K.A.O. P241/11/5. Parish Registers. All Saints Church
 2. K.A.O. P241/12/34, K.A.O. P371/12/5-6; K.A.O. P99/12/2
 3. K.A.O. P241/11/9
 4. K.A.O. P99/12/2
 5. J.P.Taylor. The Unreformed Workhouse in E.W.Martin (ed) From Parish to Union. London 1972 p 69

content to run the workhouses in the most economical way they could, using the available labour without undue exploitation of the young and the old who formed the bulk of the inmates and to find new uses for their buildings. It was not until the last few decades, when the costs of the poor law were becoming frightening, that fresh attempts were made to make the labour of the inmates profitable. This time they were more successful for there were well established models of industrial enterprise elsewhere to imitate. Efficient and profitable manufactories were established both in Maidstone and in Wrotham. By 1780, Tonbridge was making a profit of £300 a year from properly organised workhouse labour.⁽¹⁾ By 1800 the Wrotham manufactory was clearing £1,000 each year by exploiting the military needs of the war with France.⁽²⁾

By an exchange of several small parcels of land with Lord Romney, Maidstone was able to erect a manufactory of three stories behind the workhouse, again to exploit the needs of the military who had large establishments in the town. After the beginning of war in 1782, it also employed female labour from the town in making canvas bags and tarpaulins.⁽³⁾

Cranbrook parish on the other hand went in for parish farming. They rented two large farms in 1782, appropriated the almost derelict Sissinghurst Castle as a workhouse, and a bailiff to run the farm as distinct from the Master of the

1. K.A.O. P371/12/5-6

2. K.A.O. P406/12/16 (Wrotham Manufactory Day Book)

3. Russell. Maidstone. op. cit. p 380

workhouse; and with pauper labour made a great success of the enterprise. An important measure of the success of all these new enterprises was that the labourers no longer just got encouragement money, but the full rate for the job, so that many of the able bodied who had families could now live outside the workhouse.⁽¹⁾ The residents, some old, some not, could still get their pence money. All these enterprises had a measure of success, fuelled by the demands of war, but the demand petered out during the post war depression. Four of the five parishes made a profit for about twenty years but though most of the four hundred Kentish parishes turned their workhouses to the production of goods, only sixteen ever made a profit.⁽²⁾

Economically then, workhouses were failures. The labour was necessarily inefficient being mostly incapable or inferior; the old, the young, the handicapped. Management was also inferior and the products they concentrated upon were those in which the markets were already over competitive, in cloth working or its subsidiaries. It is also possible that the deterrent functions, such as strict rules and punishment of offenders, may have conflicted with the co-operation essential to work together for profitable employment.⁽³⁾

Because of their failures economically, and the fact that they proved to be so expensive to maintain, the pre

1. K.A.O. P406/12/16 Wrotham Day Book

2. Taylor in Martin (ed) op. cit. pp 69-70

3. J.R. Poynter. Society and Pauperism. London 1972 p 16

1834 workhouses have often been regarded as total failures by many historians of the Old Poor Law.⁽¹⁾ This is not necessarily so. Parishes had always adopted pragmatic solutions to the problems of poor relief, and they were not found wanting in this respect when faced with problems of expensive workhouses. The virtual exclusion of the young able-bodied who would not be subjected to the 'workhouse test', deprived the establishments of the only people capable of sustained daily work to make any kind of work profitable.⁽²⁾ A workforce consisting of the aged, the handicapped, unmarried mothers and children would be impossible to organise in the systematic way essential for success. Inevitably they became a burden on the parishes but no evidence has been found of the exploitation of these unfortunates to 'earn their own bread'. The tiny sums listed as their earnings, year after year in the accounts, would seem to rule this out.⁽³⁾

Workhouses were intended to have deterrent and disciplinary functions as well as economic. Rules were, therefore, very important. No rules have survived for our five parishes but there are some in existence for workhouses in other parts of West Kent and since these all resemble each other in their behavioural expectations of the inmates, it is a reasonable assumption that those of the five parishes in question would also be of the same kind. Those

1. D. Marshall. *The English Poor*. op. cit. pp 139-143

2. Poynter. op. cit. p 20

3. K.A.O. P371/12/4; P241/11/6-7; P100/12/4-5

available for comparison are the rules of Dartford, Strood, Goudhurst and Farnborough, all within reasonable distance.⁽¹⁾

Recent research has been showing that the workhouse did not play such an important role in the treatment of the aged as previously thought, but this is no cause for any belief that when they were inmates they did not have to obey the rules, or have special treatment other than at the discretion of the Governor or Vestry. Such rules as have survived predicate a strict regime, and the curbs placed on their personal freedom could have made life very difficult. In Goudhurst, for instance, all those too old to work were expected to attend church daily.⁽²⁾ How onerous this would be would depend on the distance of the House from the church and the physical condition of the old person. There was always grace before and after all meals, regular prayers and reading aloud of holy works. The old were certainly included in the restrictions governing the use of tobacco, snuff and tea. Old men were allowed to smoke one pipe after dinner and one pipe after supper but since they were getting regular pocket money and weekly distributions of tobacco, some relaxation of the rules would surely have occurred occasionally.⁽³⁾ Tea and snuff were allowed to the old women from time to time.

Inmates were forbidden to leave the premises without

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1. K.A.O. P110/18/7 (Dartford); K.A.O. P157/8/1 (Goudhurst) P47/18/12 (Farnborough); Smetham. op. cit. P 272 (Strood)
 2. K.A.O. P157/8/1
 3. K.A.O. P110/18/7

the express permission of the Governor, though Dissenters, of whom there were many in the region, were permitted to attend their own meeting houses, on condition that they returned immediately the service was over.⁽¹⁾ This restriction of movement gives the impression of a prison like environment, discouraging and frustrating to those old still capable of going about, who had lived for many years in the parish and who might still have friends or family there. Some of the old persistently left the workhouse without leave. Some of them refused to stay there. Repeated acts of indiscipline on the part of the aged were punished and for the old this consisted of the loss of the next meal.⁽²⁾ Those who refused to stay, and they could not be kept there against their will, were often left to fend for themselves unless the parish could find a member of his or her family to accept responsibility. Widow Martha Poyle discharged herself twice from the Cranbrook workhouse though the officers obtained warrants to take her there in 1729 and in 1730. Similar warrants to get her son, living in Frittenden, to support her produced no result. She was not completely abandoned by the parish. Though she got no further pension, she was found sharing accommodation and her rent was paid. Being well on in her seventies, she lived on the edge of starvation, at least constantly 'in want' until the parish removed her for the third and last time to the House in 1733, just a few months before her death.⁽³⁾

1. K.A.O. P157/8/1
2. K.A.O. P47/18/12
3. K.A.O. P100/12/4

Workhouse rules contained strict timetables: getting up by the clock, eating, working, relaxing and going to bed to a timetable. Such regulations combined a strict regime with deterrence but since any available source relating to workhouses is of a general nature, it is not possible to be absolutely precise about how far they were applied to the aged. A tentative argument has been put forward that as many of the old were past work there would be a number of relaxations. Some workhouse rules make the point that the aged inmates should always be spoken to kindly and always approached quietly and calmly.⁽¹⁾ This suggests an attempt to provide a decent environment and treatment. There may be a case for the reappraisal of the idea of the old unreformed *workhouse as a place of constant noise, abuse, overcrowding and lacking in decency.*⁽²⁾ All these arguments, whether for or against, involve making value judgements which are difficult either to prove or disprove. Some workhouses were obviously more efficiently run than others, but the fact that they remained in use for so long, despite their costliness, appears an admission that no better system could be found to take their place.

Overcrowding is a charge that may be levelled at these institutions with some justification. The probable relationship between overcrowding and the high incidence of infection and mortality has already been established. The inventory which accompanied the new set of rules issued for

1. K.A.O. P110/18/7; P47/18/12

2. S. & B. Webb. *The Old Poor Law*. op. cit. p 246

the Goudhurst workhouse in 1748 lists fifteen beds and a total of thirty inmates, eight adults and twenty-two children.⁽¹⁾ The obvious conclusion is that most, if not all, shared a bed with another. The inventory does not mention any beds in reserve so that an increase in numbers, which always occurred in the winter, would probably mean that some of the children, at least, would be three to a bed.

A deed of contract between Shadrach Baldwin and Cowden parish, dated 1782, indicates the Vestry contracting for eighteen poor in the summer and twenty in winter. The accompanying inventory mentions ten beds only dispersed through six bedrooms.⁽²⁾

A final example from Tonbridge shows the practice to be widespread in the region. An inventory made in 1766 when the parish contracted out the workhouse to William Parker and John Ashdown, listed twenty eight rooms on two floors. Those on the upper floor contained thirty beds. Included in the same deed was the provision that at the termination of the three year contract, all the inmates were to be provided with a new set of clothing. The overseers accounts for 1769 recorded that fifty nine people were reclothed.⁽³⁾

Bed sharing was undoubtedly very widespread and historians have commented on the practice in other parts of the country. In the Wisbech workhouse in 1720, boys and

1. K.A.O. P157/8/1

2. K.A.O. P99/12/2

3. Tonbridge Archives A169. K.A.O. P371/12/5

girls slept three to a bed, while adults and the 'elderly' were 'disposed of only two to a bed'.⁽¹⁾

The custom did not cease until after 1834 when the Poor Law Commissioners ordered a separate bed for each workhouse inmate.⁽²⁾ The Maidstone Journal of January 8th 1836 contained an advertisement for 'thirty bedsteads able to accommodate one person only' destined for the new Tonbridge Union workhouse.

Sleeping two to a bed, with four, sometimes six, beds to a room is undoubted overcrowding. The statement does not carry blame since it is written from a twentieth century viewpoint and with the benefit of increased knowledge. Using the 1766 inventory for Tonbridge workhouse, which may be justifiably regarded as a well-constructed, purpose-built example⁽³⁾, it is possible to see the errors, though made in ignorance, which led to the ease with which infection could spread among the occupants. Rooms, eighteen and twenty-five on the upper floor, contained five and four beds respectively. The inventory listed no curtains, no floor covering, no fireplace. Since such things as pokers, tongs, firepans, rugs, curtains and so on were included in the lists of goods found in the downstairs rooms, it would be reasonable to assume that if present in the bedrooms they

1. Hampson. Cambridge. op. cit. p 74

2. K.A.O. G/To/AM/1. Minutes of the Board of Guardians of the Tonbridge Union, 1836.

3. Until recently the eighteenth century workhouse remained relatively intact and the original layout could be worked out.

would also have been included.⁽¹⁾

The absence of such items of additional comfort in the bedrooms is not necessarily a sign of a hard nosed attitude on the part of the parish. Inventories of the poorer sort of labourer also show a lack of these items. This does not obviate the use of shutters for the windows or rushes on the floor, which were still in common use. The bedclothes listed seem very meagre; a sheet, two blankets and a coverlet.⁽²⁾ These may have been adequate if the bed was occupied by two persons and are again comparable with the inventories of labourers, when they can be found. George Goff, a blacksmith of West Peckham, ran away in 1754 leaving his child to the charge of the parish. He also had only a bolster, two blankets, a sheet and a coverlet.⁽³⁾

The real danger came from the fact of so many being crowded into one room, probably lacking adequate ventilation. In winter months, with windows closed, infection could spread rapidly from one to the other. Similarly the process could be repeated with the herding together of large numbers in workrooms or rest rooms during the colder months.

Few precise numbers of aged inmates are available for any workhouse, but enough are available to strengthen the hypothesis that once the authorities realised it was both expensive and dangerous to keep too many there, the numbers

1.Ton. Arch. A 169

2. Ibid.

3. K.A.O. Q/SO/W9

began to drop and pension lists came back into the overseers accounts. In fairness to the eighteenth century authorities, it should be acknowledged here that in spite of the enormous advances made in therapeutics, and in the control of the spread of disease, the problem of high infectivity and high mortality among the old in institution type habitations has still not been totally resolved.⁽¹⁾

Estimates of the aged populations of all workhouses are little more than 'guestimates'. Some weekly returns have been preserved for the Wrotham workhouse for the years 1757 to 1783, giving numbers, costs and ages, but they are incomplete. The information is arranged in tabular form overleaf, Table 6.2. A sudden rise in numbers appearing after 1761 was the result of an extension to the premises.⁽²⁾ An agreement with a new contractor, dated 1789, indicated that the parish then wished to contract for forty people. Since this is also the number contracted for in 1761, the actual numbers catered for during the intervening years suggest gross overcrowding at times. The totals given in the table are the calculated averages for each year, but the number of inmates varied from week to week, always being higher in the winter. In 1800 the only year for which figures are available for each month, numbers ranged from forty in August, the lowest total, to over seventy in February 1801, giving an average of fifty-one.⁽³⁾ This

1. e.g. Stafford, April 1985; Glasgow, November 1985.

2. K.A.O. P406/12/27

3. K.A.O. P406/12/27-40

Table 6.2

ANALYSIS OF INMATES. WROTHAM WORKHOUSE
1757 - 1783 (Information not complete)

YEAR	MEN	WOMEN	BOYS	GIRLS	TOTAL	CONTRACT PER WEEK
						s. d.
1757					27	2 6
1758					30	2 4
1759	}	Building extensions			31	2 4
1760		no information				
1761					40	2 4
1762	4	8 (inc 5	<----23----		49	2 4
1763		mothers)			62	2 3
1764					54	2 6
1765	5	10	19	15	49	2 6
1766	4	10	<----32----		46	2 6
1767/68		No information				
1769					41	2 6
1770/75		No information				
1776	5	7	14	9	35	2 6
1777						
1778	5	17	19	28	72	2 6
1779/80					55	?
1781	4	4	22	15	47	2 11
1782	6	8	18	8	40	2 11
1783	4	9	12	9	34	2 6
1789	New agreements		40 paupers at 2s 6d.			
1800			55 paupers at 4s 0d.			
1801			63 paupers at 4s 6d.			

Refs: K.A.O. P406/12/31,32,36,39

illustrates clearly the overcrowding which took place during the winter months when respiratory diseases were most common and large numbers would cause stresses on the organisation. Other diseases, such as dysentery, or food poisoning, would spread with equal rapidity. The maximum average of inmates for any one year was seventy-two in 1778. The table shows that the high numbers were accounted for by a large proportion of children, adults seldom approaching more than thirty per cent.⁽¹⁾ This is in line with the number of adults included in the workhouse inventory for Goudhurst in 1748. Out of thirty inmates there, twenty-two, seventy-three per cent, were children.⁽²⁾ The twenty-three children listed for Wrotham in 1763 were accompanied by five mothers, so there is a strong presumption that many of the seventeen females present in 1778 were the mothers of the forty-seven children there that year.⁽³⁾

At any one time it is, therefore, likely that more than a quarter to a third of the total population of any workhouse was aged over sixty. Even in those workhouses established under Gilbert's Act⁽⁴⁾ and intended only for the aged, impotent and children, the same distribution is apparent. No workhouses were built in West Kent under this Act, but about twelve came into being in East Kent through the amalgamation of several small parishes. River workhouse, taking inmates from twelve small parishes, took a hundred

1. K.A.O. P406/12/31,32,36,39

2. K.A.O. P157/8/1

3. K.A.O. P406/12/27

4. K.A.O. Q/SBe 41; Gilbert's Act 22 Geo.III c83 (1781-1782)

and forty seven persons for its first intake in 1783. This was made up of twenty-four per cent aged, (twenty-seven men and women). Children under ten, forty-three in all, accounted for a further forty-four per cent. The remainder were handicapped persons and unmarried mothers.⁽¹⁾

A similar pattern is to be found in the Royston workhouse in Cambridgeshire. In 1774, out of twenty-six residents, three were men over sixty, two were women of the same age, while fourteen were children.⁽²⁾

A final example can be drawn from Tonbridge. Some fragments of a record of weekly totals has been preserved for the years 1800 to 1804. While these years may be outside our period proper, they are sufficiently near to illustrate the pattern prevailing at that time. Out of the totals for each month, the proportion of over fifties remains very low, even for the winter months when the total population shows a dramatic increase. The lowest number of inmates recorded for any one week in the workhouse was thirty-nine and the highest was seventy-six.⁽³⁾

The numbers for 1800 are presented tabularly in Table 6.3. This does not mean that Tonbridge workhouse proper, accommodating 60 persons, was always grossly overcrowded. Since the 1770's the parish had been renting Peach Hall Farm House to provide additional workhouse places.

Overcrowding has been the main environmental charge

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1. K.A.O. Q/SBe 41
 2. Hampson. op. cit. p 88
 3. K.A.O. P371/12/15

Table 6.3

NUMBER OF AGED IN TONBRIDGE WORKHOUSE IN 1800
(Compared with other Age Groups)

TOTAL NUMBER OF INMATES AND MONTH	MALES		FEMALES		% OF TOTAL (MALES AND FEMALES)
	Age 50-80	Over 80	Age 50-80	Over 80	
Jan. 68	9		7	1	26.6
Feb. 64	9		7	1	26.8
Mar. 60	9		7	1	28.0
Apr. 61	7		7	1	24.5
May 64	7		7	2	25.0
Jun. 58	8	1	7	2	31.0
Jul. 54	7	1	7	1	30.0
Aug. 53	7		7	1	28.3
Sep. 52	7		7	1	29.0
Oct. 60	7		8	1	26.6
Nov. 66	8		9	1	27.2
Dec. 76	7		8	1	21.0

that the evidence will support against the eighteenth century workhouse. They were also cold and lacking in comfort and privacy. Like the parish almshouses in which most of the old had previously lived, the furnishings were sparse in the extreme. Practically all the rooms served a dual purpose, as workrooms, dining rooms and often as rest rooms. This was the triple function of Room No.2 in the Tonbridge workhouse.⁽¹⁾ Of all twenty-eight rooms in the building, heating was provided for only two; the multi-purpose room described above and the Board Room in which Vestry Meetings were held, and overseers met to discuss official business, but it was not available for the inmates.⁽²⁾

In Cowden there was one heated room. The aged were allowed to use this as a separate warm rest room under normal conditions but had to vacate it if necessary for the use of parish officers.⁽³⁾ Wrotham was the only workhouse, as far as the evidence shows, which provided a separate warmed room for the use of the old only.⁽⁴⁾ Maidstone and Cranbrook workhouses were both sizeable enough to provide such a room but there is no evidence in the sources about it, though bills for wood and coal were common.⁽⁵⁾

Comfortable chairs with cushions, the permanent appendage of the old in the twentieth century, were

1. Ton. Arch. A 169

2. Ibid.

3. K.A.O. P99/12/2

4. K.A.O. P406/12/32

5. K.A.O. P241/11/6-7; K.A.O. P100/12/4-6

conspicuous by their absence from all references to workhouse furniture. All sat on forms or stools.⁽¹⁾ The inventories of utensils for both Tonbridge and Cowden (1766 and 1782) show everything used by the inmates to have been deficient in quantity. No knives were mentioned, but there should at least have been enough spoons and forks to go round. Trenchers, mugs and plates were also insufficient for all to eat at the same time. Unless some of the old had their own, sharing was inevitable or possibly eating in relays.⁽²⁾ While this was of itself a potent means of transmitting intestinal infections, meal times could be chaotic and make a nonsense about strict rules relating to standards of behaviour.

A short discussion about workhouse contractors will terminate this section. They have traditionally been portrayed as corrupt and venal, driving their charges to greater labour for inadequate food to ensure greater profit for themselves.⁽³⁾ This may be true or it may not be true; the truth will not emerge until a far greater amount of research into their function has been accomplished. From the West Kent evidence, and such deeds of contract as have survived, it would seem that all contractors were subject to quite strict conditions of service and were frequently inspected by members of the Vestry in rota. Contracts were short term, usually annual, but of not more than three

1. Tonbridge Archives A 169

2. Cowden K.A.O. P99/12/2 (copied into Overseers Account Book 1782)

3. S. & B. Webb. Old Poor Law. op. cit. pp 246-247

years, so that if they proved to be unsatisfactory, they could be removed quickly.⁽¹⁾ All inmates had the right to complain about conditions during the weekly inspection.⁽²⁾

Some effort was made to treat the old with kindness. Pocket money, extra tobacco and beer or tea has already been mentioned. At Strood and Farnborough, the rules stated that they were to be treated with tenderness and not to be expected to work beyond their capacity.⁽³⁾ In their contract signed with Tonbridge parish in 1766, Parker and Ashdown both agreed to do the old people's washing, provide suitable quarters and a diet suitable for their ages.⁽⁴⁾ What was a 'diet suitable for their ages'? This is the subject of the next section.

THE WORKHOUSE DIET

The workhouse diet has often been condemned by twentieth century historians as being too rigid, monotonous and deficient both in quality and quantity. On the other hand, contemporary writers condemned it for being too liberal and the prime cause of overcrowded workhouses, the poor preferring to laze about and indulge themselves at parish expense. The evidence for West Kent has already shown that there were few prepared to suffer the workhouse regime in order to over indulge themselves on the diet provided.

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1. Wrotham, Cowden, contracted out the poor annually. Tonbridge and Cranbrook for three years. Maidstone appointed a Governor from the start.
 2. K.A.O. P 157/8/8 (Goudhurst) P371/8/2 (Tonbridge)
 3. Smetham. op. cit. p 271. Ton. Arch. A 169
K.A.O. P47/18/12 (Farnborough)
 4. Ton. Arch. A 169

Even though efforts were made by parishes to ease the lot of the old by little extras like tea, beer, tobacco, the food supplied must take an important role in their treatment.

It must be assumed that dietary scales were prepared for the workhouses of our specific parishes but none have survived. A great many diets of the pre 1834 workhouses have been published, and all show a number of similarities.⁽¹⁾ There was a widespread reliance on bread and cheese; gruel and suet pudding. Most gave meat daily or three to four times a week. Butter was used sparingly while ale or beer was the customary drink. Printed dietaries are available for both the Strood and Farnborough workhouses.⁽²⁾ In content they resemble most other printed dietaries, but as Strood seems to be a little more generous, it is appended below as an example of the type of diet that would be supplied to the aged in one of the workhouses which are under discussion. Rather, it is an example of the type of printed dietary which any of the parishes might produce. This thesis argues that printed dietaries should not be taken at their face value: as being everything and all that was supplied.

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1. D. Marshall. Poor in the Eighteenth Century. op. cit. p 139 (Cartmel)
An Account of Several Workhouses. (Whitechapel) p 6
 2. Smetham. op. cit. p 293
K.A.O. P47/18/12 (Farnborough)

STROOD WORKHOUSE DIETARY (1727)

<u>DAY</u>	<u>BREAKFAST</u>	<u>DINNER</u>	<u>SUPPER</u>
Sunday	Bread, Cheese	Beef Buttock Pudding	Bread, Cheese
Monday	Broth	Cold Meat Pudding	Bread, Cheese
Tuesday	Milk Porridge	Beef Pudding	Bread, Butter
Wednesday	Broth	Cold Meat Pudding	Bread, Cheese
Thursday	Milk Porridge	Beef Pease Pudding	Bread, Butter
Friday	Pease Porridge	Cold Meat Pudding	Bread, Cheese
Saturday	Milk Porridge	Thickened Milk	Bread, Butter

Small beer to drink with all meals.⁽¹⁾

This is a monotonous diet by any standard. The important question is whether it is more or less monotonous than the pensioner would have had if he or she were fending alone. Very few of the printed diets available for study give actual quantities of foodstuffs, so that the assessment of their adequacy becomes difficult. It has been established earlier, (Ch.4), that pensioners required between one and one and a half pound of bread daily, together with smaller quantities of other basic foodstuffs to survive, in amounts yielding energy values of between 2,000 and 2,500 calories depending on sex and other variables. Many workhouse diets where actual quantities are given have been analysed and have been found to be defective in many respects. Taken at their face value, they are monotonous, unimaginative and inadequate in amount. The resulting deficiencies would be not only of calories, but also of essential nutrients,

1. Smetham. op. cit. p 293

leading inevitably to a steady loss of weight, under-nourishment, possibly the development of unrecognised deficiency diseases and diminishing resistance to infection.⁽¹⁾ It is the stated position in this case that these diets must not be regarded as the entire diet provided, but the minimum.

Evidence which can be related to the specific parishes under review, in the form of accounts, bills, vouchers, support the hypothesis that printed dietaries have been taken too literally in the past. The West Kent evidence points to the conclusion that any printed dietary scale was not the complete food intake; rather a basic allowance to which other foodstuffs were added from day to day as they were available. No dietary scale survives for the Maidstone workhouse, but some of the earliest payment vouchers are still extant. A payment voucher dated August 13th 1720, the very week the workhouse opened, shows that during that week, in addition to the basic requirements of flour, bread, cheese, beef and butter, purchases for the house included a variety of root and green vegetables, figs, currants and lemons. More surprising, since it may be supposed that such matters as dietary scales would never again be so fresh in the officers' minds, are the special foodstuffs obtained for named individuals, who only a few days earlier had been aged out-pensioners. There are extra quarts of beer for Joseph Watchers, Abraham Beard, Old Swift, Old Card and Old

1. Drummond & Wilbraham. op. cit. p 258

Brunger, all of whom were over seventy. Old Widows Brimstead and Mephram were also allowed extra beer. This was 'strong' beer from the local brewery, not the 'small' beer customarily drunk and brewed on the premises.⁽¹⁾ Ezekiel Morris, aged seventy-eight, obviously could not cope with the home made bread, for he was being supplied with soft rolls from a local baker and treacle in which to dip them.⁽²⁾

Widow Brimstead lived in the workhouse for three years before her death. Vouchers spanning these years show that she had her beer each week, and occasionally extra milk, sherry, fish and fancy cakes.⁽³⁾

While bills and vouchers have not survived for all our parishes, many of the entries in the overseers accounts suggest a more liberal diet than is conveyed by any printed dietary. In April 1729, Cranbrook purchased a hundred herring and fifty mackerel. The workhouse was then full, fifty inmates in all, so that there was ample for all. Thereafter, herring and mackerel were regularly on the menu.⁽⁴⁾ The accounts over the years record the purchase of damsons, plums, onions, parsnips, peas and by 1750 tea was included as well.⁽⁵⁾

All the workhouses had large gardens and within a few years of opening these were in production. Beech House,

1. K.A.O. P241/12/3

2. Ibid.

3. K.A.O. P241/12/3-20

4. K.A.O. P100/12/2. P100/8/1

5. K.A.O. P100/12/4

which Cranbrook hired as a workhouse, had three large gardens.⁽¹⁾ Maidstone had several acres adjacent to its institution.⁽²⁾ The same applies to Tonbridge, Cowden and to Wrotham.⁽³⁾ With the produce from these, and pork and bacon supplied by the hogs kept by the old men, even poultry and eggs, the diet could be quite varied. Within a few years all the workhouses were self sufficient in vegetables, and some had a surplus which they offered for sale to the local people.⁽⁴⁾

In the Vestry Minutes for Dartford parish, there is a minute dated May 1733 that the workhouse visitors felt it only reasonable that the inmates should have a change of diet from time to time. It was ordered that in future, on all Feast Days, they should have roast meat instead of boiled, commencing the following Sunday with a shoulder of veal. The House had fifteen inmates that year, five over sixty. Christmas was to be marked by a special diet, including 'plum pudding'.⁽⁵⁾

Overseers accounts have recorded the purchase of such varied items as figs, radishes, custard, eggs, oranges, cheese cake, eel and mutton pies, all of which indicate no rigid adherence to any strict dietary regime.⁽⁶⁾ Agreements were also drawn up with contractors, that a certain number

1. K.A.O. P100/8/1

2. K.A.O. P241/12/8

3. K.A.O. P371/12/5-6. P99/12/2. P406/125-7

4. Ibid. Ibid.

5. K.A.O. P224/18/6

6. K.A.O. Accounts for Cowden, Cranbrook, Maidstone, Tonbridge, Wrotham.

of the pigs reared on the premises were to be reserved for the use of the inmates.⁽¹⁾ While the accounts concerned and the sort of foods bought do not provide evidence of an over liberal diet, there are good reasons for believing that they were not so rigid or miserable as they have hitherto been regarded. Compared with the diet that the average labourer or aged pensioner would be able to provide for himself, they possibly might seem liberal. With an assured three meals a day, the pensioner was probably better off in many respects as an inmate than as an out-pensioner.

To conclude this chapter, a short general study of the workhouse movement follows in an attempt to discover whether the charge of failure so often made against the system seems justified in the light of the West Kent evidence. The movement appeared attractive because it fitted in with contemporary desire for reform, for larger units of administration and the savings which would certainly follow. The failure to achieve the economic goals, and the failure to persuade the able bodied to accept the discipline and organisation essential to create the economically viable workforce, have overshadowed some of the real achievements of the workhouse system.⁽²⁾

Economic success would appear to be doomed from the start. Some of the reasons can be re-emphasised. The principal workhouse employments were all related to the declining cloth industry, making it difficult to dispose

1. K.A.O. P224/18/6 Lenham Workhouse Accounts
2. S. & B. Webb. Poor Law. op. cit. p 18

of the finished articles.

The lack of a sufficient number of strong capable persons to keep up an adequate production line resulted in an insufficient amount of goods to sell to make any real money. Those that were produced were often unsaleable because of their poor quality. The minute earnings of the workhouse inmates made a mockery of the grandiose schemes put about before the workhouses were opened.⁽¹⁾ Maidstone workhouse was built to accommodate 160 persons, most of whom were expected to be able to work. By 1724 it held only forty, seventeen women, five old men and eighteen children. Of these only three women were able to work, assisted by eight children. All were occupied in spinning.⁽²⁾ The total cost of maintaining the workhouse for that year was a hundred pounds, while total earnings, including the sale of a hog, and hiring out labour for the harvest, was only eighteen pounds.⁽³⁾ 1724 was also the year when the epidemic made its first appearance, increasing outgoings.

Other parishes fared little better. By 1772, after nearly fifty years of existence, Tonbridge workhouse could only manage earnings of seventeen guineas, by spinning, making mops, selling surplus garden produce, the annual cost of running it having reached four hundred pounds by then.⁽⁴⁾

Within a few years of opening, most workhouses had ceased to place the economic aspects first. Inmates 'labour'

1. Russell. Maidstone. p 223

2. Ibid. p 224

3. K.A.O. P241/11/5

4. K.A.O. P371/12/5

took on a new light. They earned their keep by working for wages outside the House, or working within it for their mutual benefit, since with new buildings, or large buildings hired on long leases, which could not be disposed of, new uses had to be speedily found to cut the costs.

An obvious use, and one which was quickly adopted, was as temporary lodgings for homeless families or for those families removed by the parish and awaiting transport. Elizabeth Roots was lodged in Tonbridge for several weeks in late 1732 while the dispute between Tonbridge and Bidborough about her settlement shuttled backwards and forwards from the justices at Sevenoaks to the Sessions at Maidstone.⁽¹⁾

They were also used as lodgings in the generally accepted meaning of the term. Duodecimus Knowlden, a tradesman of Cranbrook, arranged for his sister-in-law Mary Knowlden to have a room in the workhouse at four pounds ten shillings a year. She resided there from 1754 until her death in 1758, her status being acknowledged with the provision of two ounces of tea for her own use weekly.⁽²⁾

In April 1758 the Wrotham overseers arranged lodgings in the House for Old Samuel Hodge, the cost to cover both his firing and his washing.⁽³⁾ No reason for the stay was given. It turned out to be only temporary, thirteen weeks in all, so there could be several reasons; the sickness of his wife or himself, an injury, even the unavailability of

1. K.A.O. P371/12/4
2. K.A.O. P100/12/4
3. K.A.O. P406/12/27

lodgings elsewhere. Hodge was never a Wrotham pensioner and was being charged for his keep. There is abundant evidence that workhouses were used for all these reasons. In 1763, Thomas Best was nursed in the Wrotham workhouse following a broken leg, while the parish simultaneously was providing board and lodging to his family there while awaiting removal to Eltham.⁽¹⁾

To sum up: Workhouses in West Kent had a multiplicity of functions. There is little evidence of the old belief that the eighteenth century workhouse was an outward expression of the repressive framework of deterrence and punishment.⁽²⁾ The records do not reveal a dishonesty of management, lack of discipline or the corruption which supposedly made the workhouse system entirely evil.⁽³⁾

A sweeping general statement such as this carries with it the implication that there was a nationwide similarity in workhouses in the eighteenth century. They were not, however, the core of a national system of poor law practices as were those of the nineteenth century.⁽⁴⁾ The picture which emerges from the Kentish evidence is that each workhouse was as independent as the parish which administered it. Many similarities were inevitable; there were faults and inefficiencies, but there does not appear to have been a basic desire to punish, exploit or ill-treat.

1. K.A.O. P406/12/5

2. S. & B. Webb. *Poor Law*. op. cit. p 246-8

3. Ibid.

4. The Poor Law Report (1834). eds. S.G. & E.O. Checkland. London 1974. Introduction p 38.

Maintaining a measure of harmony, discipline and extracting a certain amount of work from such a heterogeneous population as any workhouse would present, must have necessitated a certain amount of strictness.

There was undoubted overcrowding, especially in the winter months. This became dangerous to the inmates, particularly the old, from time to time. Contemporaries may not have been aware of the links between disease, ventilation, hygiene, heating, air space and bed space. This is the language of the twentieth century. Overcrowding was common in all labourers' cottages, many of whom brought up large families in cottages no larger than the almshouses already described as housing out-pensioners.⁽¹⁾ It is doubtful if any inmate would feel aggrieved at the physical environment though they might chafe at the restrictions placed on them. They were also accustomed to sudden, devastating outbreaks of epidemic disease and the high mortality may have been regarded with alarm only by the very observant.⁽²⁾ More investigation into the matter would produce better answers. The overriding conclusion must be that institutionalisation did not play as great a role in the lives of the aged under the Old Poor Law as has hitherto been believed.

But while the lot of the aged cannot be said to have been one of ease and comfort in the workhouse, neither can

1. J. Boys. General View of the Agriculture of Kent. London 1796. p 30-31
2. Such as the Rev. D. Davis.

it be said that the workhouse initiated a new era of harshness.

It is submitted that there has, in the past, been a tendency to regard the pre 1834 workhouse as being of an identical nature to that of the post 1834 institution. They were, in effect, entirely different institutions. Under the Old Poor Law, the old were endowed with both a moral and a legal claim upon their parish of settlement for at least a minimal maintenance. After 1834, parishes were to be guided by the principle that the standard of living administered within the workhouse was not to be as good as that which could be achieved by the very poorest independent labourer; the principle of 'less eligibility'. Implicit in such a philosophy is that the aged who reached the workhouse were being subjected to punishment on the grounds of age alone. This is, however, outside the scope of this study.

Supplementing the provisions of relief under the Old Poor Law administered by the parish officers were other means of easing the lot of the aged. These other supportive agencies have been designated as self-help, family help and charity. These additional factors form the subject matter of Chapter Seven.

CHAPTER SEVEN - OTHER SUPPORTIVE AGENCIES

The emphasis in this dissertation has been that the aged had a moral and legal right to relief under the Old Poor Law, but that in most parishes this was a minimal maintenance, sufficient to sustain life when bread was cheap, but requiring something more to avoid malnutrition and disease and also to provide them with a small modicum of comfort. Some aged were able to follow some form of part time employment, for which they were paid. If they were paid by the parish there is evidence as to what they did and how much they were paid.⁽¹⁾ That they were also employed by private individuals, who were the parishes' normal employers of labour, is borne out by many entries in the overseers' accounts of the purchase of the tools of the trade. Women were supplied with cards for carding wool.⁽²⁾ Their spinning wheels were repaired.⁽³⁾ Men were given hoes, scythes, spades and sickles, among other utensils.⁽⁴⁾

They might also continue with the various forms of self help with which they had a life long familiarity, ranging from the cultivation of surplus produce from larger plots; pig and poultry keeping or to the sale of collectable material from heaths, hedgerows and woodlands. Self help and those other ways of making life easier for themselves will be the subject matter of the first section of this chapter.

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1. K.A.O. P100/12/1-7
 2. K.A.O. P100/12/2
 3. K.A.O. P241/11/2-3
 4. K.A.O. P371/12/1-2; P100/12/2

Discussion now passes beyond parish relief proper to include other supportive agencies which had an important role in the treatment of the aged, namely that played by their children, and that of charity. Under the law, children of the aged had a responsibility to maintain them if they 'had ability'. This will form the content of section two. The third and final section will discuss the role of charity, giving to the latter the widest possible definition, from long standing charitable foundations to single donations in wills, on special occasions or in times of crisis. Any discussion of charity in Kent must, and will, be undertaken in the light of the considerable research into the county's charitable donations undertaken by the late Professor W.K.Jordan⁽¹⁾

SELF HELP AND FRINGE BENEFITS

It has been suggested in an earlier chapter (Chapter Four) that there were occasions in the lives of the aged when they might be getting insufficient from the parish in the way of a pension and gifts in kind to sustain life. As a general rule the deficit was made up by paid work or by charity and family support. In addition, the very poor of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries made use of 'the trifles of nature' to a far greater extent than in the later centuries. It is true to say that in the post war world of the 1970's and 80's, most members of society would need to make a great effort of imagination to appreciate the

1. W.K.Jordan. Social Institutions in Kent 1480 - 1640.
Kent Arch. Society. Maidstone 1960

difference to the well being of a pauper such trifles could make.

Self help is more readily understood from home grown fruit and vegetables to the economist's precept of saving a part of 'present production for future consumption', that is saving for the future. The landless labourers and their wives, who ultimately became the aged poor of former times, lived throughout their lives on the margins of want, existing from week to week or even from day to day. They had no surplus resources to husband and a fortnight's sickness of the wage earner could drive a family to beggary.⁽¹⁾

The diminishing heaths and hedgerows of the twentieth century landscape can still furnish a wealth of edibles and other useful materials but they are for the most part ignored. The vulnerability of the pre-industrial labourers to the fluctuating price of bread, periods of unemployment and high prices in general all combined to force them into habits of independence, unless they were to become beggars. They grew some of their own food, reared domestic animals in their back yards and closes and they utilised everything that nature offered.

In old age the habits of a life time would not be forgotten and it is reasonable to assume that they would be continued, when they were even more vulnerable to want and hunger with fluctuating prices, constant changes of policy among the parish officers as to suitable levels of pensions

1. S. & B. Webb. op. cit. pp 82-83

or in the case of widows the lack of suitable work or charitable bequests. It is inconceivable that while they had the health and strength they did not continue to take full advantage of the gifts of nature. Each of these, in varying abundance, each in its season, made a small but significant addition to the amalgam of pension, wages, free accommodation and other gifts which made up the standard of living of the aged pensioner.⁽¹⁾

Early Tudor legislation had decreed that every labourer's cottage should be accompanied by four acres of land to ensure a reasonable degree of self sufficiency and to counteract hunger and want in the periodic spells of dearth and dear bread. This appears to have been ineffective since by the middle of the seventeenth century more than two thirds of labourers' dwellings in the greatly swollen towns had little more than a small close and garden; some had nothing.⁽²⁾ The six almshouses built in Maidstone in 1679, under the will of Sir John Banks, had only one small room and one small garden, not more than twelve feet by twenty.⁽³⁾ But even these tiny plots could produce a variety of easily grown vegetables to supplement the usual monotonous diet of bread and cheese. The cost could be minimal, seed being saved from year to year, received as gifts from neighbours or from the overseers.

1. E.L.Jones. Seasons and Prices. London 1964 pp 30-31

2. A. Everitt. 'Farm Labourers' in J. Thirsk (ed)
Agricultural History of England and Wales. Vol IV.
London 1965 p 401

3. J.M.Russell. A History of Maidstone. Maidstone 1888 p379

John Wells of Tonbridge, said to have been old and infirm in 1768, was provided with seeds to plant his garden in 1772.⁽¹⁾ The cost of these seeds, one and sixpence, suggests a large plot for, in the same year, Cowden parish purchased a hundred cabbage plants for the workhouse garden for twopence.⁽²⁾ Since John Wells never became a regular pensioner of Tonbridge, it is very likely that in most years he was able to maintain himself by the sale of his garden produce but that 1772 was a poor year.

Some old men regularly sold vegetables to the workhouse. Cabbage plants were a common item⁽³⁾. Cranbrook is recorded in 1750 as purchasing from 'several old men', peas at sixteen pence a bushel, six gallons of onions and two bushels of turnips.⁽⁴⁾ Cornelius Pollard on the other hand occupied his time in growing quickset which was in great demand by the Maidstone parish officers for hedging parish property and, presumably, by others, for the joint pension paid to him and his wife seldom exceeded a shilling a week though Pollard was eighty five when he died in 1705.⁽⁵⁾

Pig and poultry keeping were other common occupations among the old, using their closes or even small pens outside their cottages to house the beasts. Something like two thirds of the male pensioners kept pigs; old women found

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1. K.A.O. P371/12/4
 2. K.A.O. P99/12/2
 3. Ibid.
 4. K.A.O. P100/12/4
 5. K.A.O. P241/11/2-3

chickens, geese or ducks more to their liking. These were relatively easy ways of adding a little to one's pension. The cost of feed was almost negligible and the parish often came to the rescue, especially in winter when free fodder was hard to collect. In the main the feeding depended on what could be gathered from the local wastes and woodlands, such as chestnuts, roots, beechmast, hips, haws, aloes and crab apples, and surplus produce of orchards and gardens, beans, peas, windfall apples. If we add to this long list of free feed such things as brewery waste, whey, barley and used grains, together with kitchen waste, keeping a hog or two could be a profitable proposition. When the pig was sold, the money earned, which was several pounds, ensured that one or two piglets could be bought in the market to start the process all over again, and the customary return of the offal and part of the carcass to the vendor meant that he had meat in the diet for some months to come.⁽¹⁾

Parishes often exploited pig keeping as a means of keeping old pensioners occupied, and ensuring cheap meat for the workhouse.⁽²⁾ They often purchased an initial piglet and came to the rescue when food was not easy to get. Old William Austin had a sack of oats to feed his hog from Cowden overseers in 1772⁽³⁾, Tonbridge Vestry allowed William Summer two bushels of peas in June 1766⁽⁴⁾, while

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1. R.W.Malcolmson. Life and Labour in England. 1700-1800
London 1981 p 46
 2. K.A.O. P99/12/2
 3. Ibid
 4. K.A.O. P371/8/8

they gave John Hammond corn for his hog to the value of nine shillings in 1758.⁽¹⁾ In return these parishes bought the hog for slaughter at below the market price for feeding the workhouse inmates.⁽²⁾

Heaths and moors were much more extensive in early Modern England than they are today, and the very poor made considerable use of what they had to offer. Some of the poor living in the Kentish Weald still claimed ancient rights in the shrubs and woods; of lop and top; the right to carry away fallen wood after storms and a few still claimed pannage.⁽³⁾ Rabbits and game birds were sometimes trapped, risking fines under the game laws, though the fines seem to have been light when the offence was committed on common land.⁽⁴⁾ Nothing was wasted, the flesh eaten, fur and feathers sold.

Old women were also able to profit from the heaths and woodlands. Many collected the wild flowers and other useful plants. Posies of flowers were very popular and were sold at street corners or at weekly markets. Despite the depredations of twentieth century agricultural methods, and the enormous increase of population, fritillaries, primroses, violets, cowslips and other wild flowers, still grow in abundance in West Kent, and posy selling remains a

1. K.A.O. P371/12/4

2. K.A.O. P99/12/2

3. Everitt. op. cit. pp 404-406

4. The highest fine that has been discovered, was £5 set by the Wrotham magistrates, it being so high because the offence was committed on Sunday, during the time of Divine Service.

common practice among the womenfolk of the gipsy and other travelling families who flock to the area from early spring to late autumn, working as casual labour for the hop, fruit and vegetable harvests.⁽¹⁾

Physicians, apothecaries and the general public were heavily dependent, during our period, on medicinal products prepared from herbs and other plants which grew wild. The collection of these plants was widely practiced by old women of all social classes and those who occupied themselves in this way found a ready outlet at the local apothecary's or in the weekly market. These were also often visited by qualified physicians wishing to replenish their stocks⁽²⁾, while the plants they used in preparing their decoctions for the poor seemed to cover the whole range of the Kentish flora.⁽³⁾

In rural areas some old men found a small extra income in cutting hazels for bean poles, or oziars for basket making. In the towns a much wider variety of occupations provided an extra few pence; helping stall holders on market days, such as in holding horses, sweeping up, carrying goods to people's homes or to the quayside. There was also a lot of casual work available for old women in such occupations as kitchen work in inns, washing for private citizens, cleaning, sewing.

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1. This paragraph is based on local knowledge and personal observation.
 2. See Nicholas Sudell. Description of the cure of Kentish and all other Agues. London 1669. p 8
 3. A.Revell. A Kentish Herbal. Maidstone 1984. p 81

An illness, formerly widespread in Kent, provided the elderly with several weeks work in the late summer if they wished it. The 'Kentish Ague', formerly supposed to be a form of malaria but more probably a form of undulant fever, was particularly prevalent in the Medway valley and especially around Maistone among the poor.⁽¹⁾ Surviving physicians' bills from Maidstone recorded it as being treated with bark.⁽²⁾ This, until recently, was always considered to be identical with cinchona bark and specific for malaria. The bark used in the treatment of the Kentish ague has recently been identified as that of the water willow, growing very profusely along both banks of the Medway. Powdered after drying and made into an infusion with boiling water, it was freely used as an anti-pyretic, the active principle being the salicylates, now known as aspirin. Farmers whose land bordered on the river employed both old men and old women for several weeks at a time at bark stripping, the former earning eightpence a day, the latter fourpence.⁽³⁾

Overseers accounts for the five parishes never mention the provision of artificial lighting for the old, except during the periods of sickness when the services of a night attendant were required.⁽⁴⁾ It is a reasonable conclusion

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1. Sir C. Creighton. A History of Epidemics in England. Vol. II. London 1894. p 468
 2. K.A.O. P241/12/3-34
 3. Thorold Rogers. Six Centuries of Work and Wages. Vol.VI. (1886-1902) London. p 508
 4. K.A.O. P406/12/7. Wrotham 1746. Paid for eight pounds of wax candles for smallpox victims.

that at other times they provided their own or sat in the firelight. Candles are mentioned frequently in workhouse accounts, both wax and tallow being very cheap.⁽¹⁾ Gilbert White calculated that a half penny wax candle would provide two hours light.⁽²⁾ This would work out at about threepence each week for a solitary pensioner and half that when two shared the accommodation. Even this modest expense might prove intolerable when food was dear. As even working labourers could seldom afford the expense of wax candles but made their own rushlights, it is more than likely that the old would do the same. They would not be likely to forget a skill learned in youth. Collecting rushes was a regular chore for mothers and their children, who collected them in high summer, peeled them and dried them, prior to soaking them in fat and saving them for the winter. It was customary to save all the scraps of meat and bacon fat, melting it down in a piece of hollow bark and steeping the rushes in it before storing. Gilbert White refers to rush collecting as a common occupation for old men also. After collection and drying, they cut them into even lengths, tied them into bundles and sold them in the local markets for about a shilling a pound. A pound would consist of several hundred. Rushlights could also be bought ready for use when they would cost slightly more. A rushlight fourteen inches long would give about half an hour's light and two would probably

1. K.A.O. P241/11/7

2. G. White. The Natural History of Selbourne. Everyman Ed. 1948. p 170

be adequate for an old pensioner for a whole evening.⁽¹⁾
Rushlights remained in common use throughout the eighteenth century and even as late as 1808, the Wrotham workhouse was lit by rushlights.⁽²⁾

The manifold ways in which the aged could be active in improving their own situation have been discussed in this first section. Gilbert White, writing in the middle of the eighteenth century, believed that few of the poor, young or old, failed to avail themselves of what the heaths and hedgerows had to offer.⁽³⁾ The extent to which the aged could benefit depended, naturally, on their physical condition and ease of access to the resources in the vicinity. In the case of pensioners living in West Kent, even Maidstone, the largest urban settlement, was closely integrated with its rural hinterland and the gifts of nature were close at hand.

Because of the nature of the questions which have been asked in this section, and the source materials consulted, the conclusions must be impressionistic and impossible to quantify either generally, or with reference to particular pensioners. Such occupations were inseparable from the seasonal pattern of life among the poor of pre Industrial England and remnants of this traditional behaviour survive to this day.

To conclude, it is argued that all the aged parish

1. White. op. cit. p 171
2. K.A.O. P406/12/34
3. White. op. cit. p 172

pensioners continued with these traditional patterns of life as long as their physical condition allowed and thereby improved their standard of living, whether by using the 'gifts of nature' for their own benefit, or by their sale to earn money to buy goods. None of these gains would ever appear in the overseers accounts. Some reassessment of their condition seems necessary, as a consequence, and the treatment meted out by the parish officers should cease to be regarded as the sole means of support but taking its place, as previously argued, among a whole range of measures which came into play.

THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY

Popular tradition has it that the pre Industrial family was a relatively large, complex structure, frequently made up of members of more than one or two generations and often containing extra kin, such as the siblings of the head, nephews, nieces or cousins.⁽¹⁾ The development of Family Studies as a separate discipline, the adoption of rigorous, standardised, quantitative methods to generate relevant data has altered perceptions of the family in past times. Accumulating evidence has suggested that the typical English family was of two generations, parents and children, occupying separate accommodation from other family kin, over a period of three centuries, and from the late sixteenth

1. M. Anderson. Approaches to the Western Family. 1500-1914
London 1980. pp 17 - 18

century had a mean of 4.75⁽¹⁾. Large families were often those of the wealthy, swollen by the presence of servants, sometimes by kin fulfilling servant roles.⁽²⁾

The reconstitution of individual families from parish registers point a further message; that most of the children born to these small families did not marry and settle in the parish of their birth; while many couples who married, settled and brought up their families in a particular parish had come in from elsewhere. Furthermore, for whatever reason, a large number of families chose to move on, some more than once. It was this latter type of migration that the Settlement Laws of the 1660's were designed to curb.⁽³⁾ Current hypotheses held by historians and demographers, that kinship ties beyond those of the nuclear family were shallow and of little significance in pre industrial communities may have some foundation, at least for poor families. For them, neighbours and friendly relations with them may have assumed more importance.⁽⁴⁾ In considering a supportive role for the aged poor, this concept has a special connotation.

The quantitative approach adopted in the study of the family has meant that the social relationships between the members of the same family, their behaviour toward other

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1. P. Laslett. 'Mean Household Size in England Since the Sixteenth Century' in Laslett and R. Wall (eds.) Household and Family in Past Time. Cambridge 1977. pp 125-155.
 2. Anderson. op. cit. pp 17-18
 3. K. Wrightson. English Society 1580-1680. London 1982 p43
 4. Wrightson. Ibid. p. 44

families or the extent to which family responsibilities were accepted or shared between the members have not emerged. An almost total concentration on the techniques of statistical analysis has subsumed the differences between the members of individual families, the inter-familial stresses and strains, and the extent of affection and mutual support in times of crisis. These have been regarded as impressionistic.⁽¹⁾

It is well established that the children of poor families were apprenticed or sent out into service in their early teens. Apprenticeship lasted to the age of twenty four for males and twenty one for females.⁽²⁾ When they left their masters to marry and set up households of their own, few voluntarily returned to the parishes of their birth. Similarly with those who went into service. Though these frequently changed their place of residence, it was rare for them to return to work or to marry and settle down in close proximity to their parents, but there is some evidence that many of them were still within walking distance of their birthplaces when they married.⁽³⁾ There is also evidence that the insatiable demands of London for labour would tend to draw the young from West Kent further afield, and it is known from the parish records that the Wrotham and other parish officers regularly apprenticed their pauper children

1. Anderson. op. cit. p 87

2. Laslett. *World we have Lost*. op. cit. pp 1-3

3. A. Kussmaul. Servants in Husbandry in Early Modern England. Cambridge 1981. pp 63-64

with London masters.⁽¹⁾ However far they travelled, the fact remains that they spent their most formative years, until they reached early adulthood, in the homes of persons other than their parents.

This would considerably weaken familial ties and the young people would most certainly have lost their settlements in the parishes of their birth. These facts, and the evidence which has resulted from family reconstitution, lead to the conclusion that few of the poor in Early Modern England had their older children living with them, or near enough to provide for them when they became old.⁽²⁾ Even as late as the 1851 census, about a quarter of the population over sixty five had no children left alive, while another thirty per cent had no children living near.⁽³⁾ The question of children being responsible for the maintenance of their aged parents becomes almost academic. It is at least a plausible first premise that those children who were able to support their parents were doing so, while it was the parents of those who could not, or who were not within reach, were the ones who became parish pensioners.

Some children, living in the same parish as their aged parent, seem to have been well able to provide but did not do so. The cases of Old Thomas Broomfield of Maidstone and Old Lancelot Watson of Tonbridge have already been referred

1. K.A.O. P406/12/4; P371/12/4

2. Anderson. op. cit. p 56

3. M. Anderson. Family Structure in Nineteenth Century Lancashire. London 1972. p 219

to in this respect.⁽¹⁾ But in neither case were the parish officers seen to be compelling two households to become one, nor forcing the sons to maintain their parents. This is not to say that there was no transfer of money or goods from sons to parents, but there is no evidence in the parish records. The parish may have reclaimed the amount of its relief from the estate of the old men, which it was entitled to do, but again there is no trace of this. Even with the very poor, parishes seldom tried to enforce the compulsory lodging of an aged parent. With the one or two roomed dwellings in which they lived, the presence of children, the addition of a decrepit, possibly sick, old woman could make for intolerable living conditions. The most the parish seems to have done was to get a warrant to compel a son to support a parent,⁽²⁾ or to offer a daughter financial inducements to take mothers in as lodgers, the payment being at least equivalent to the pension and the perquisites of relief in kind.⁽³⁾

The customary inducement in Maidstone to get sons or sons-in-law to support aged parents, when they were financially able to do so, was to offer exemption from the rates. John Osborne and John Burwash were both exempted between 1726 and 1731 for keeping their mothers.⁽⁴⁾

Nurse Chambers of Tonbridge, lodged with her daughter and son-in-law Anne and John Tanner for twenty three years.

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1. K.A.O. P371/12/1; P241/11/4
 2. K.A.O. P100/12/3-5
 3. K.A.O. P99/12/2
 4. K.A.O. P241/11/5

For the first ten years or so Widow Chambers was following her profession, since the parish paid only sixpence weekly for her houseroom. This spanned 1771 and 1781 when she was between fifty-two years and sixty-two years of age. After this time the payments slowly increased until Nurse Chambers was in receipt of a pension of one and six, while her daughter had occasional extra sums for nursing her, until her death in 1794 aged seventy-five.⁽¹⁾

Widow Hollands of Cowden had lodged with her son-in-law John Plant for seven years prior to her death in 1736, aged seventy-two. The parish paying sums varying from a shilling to two shillings weekly, depending on her state of health, while she continued to earn small amounts preparing her herbal medicines as she had been used to do earlier in her widowhood.⁽²⁾

Examples such as the two above are few and far between, but because so little is known about the actual quality of the relationships between the young and old, it is not justifiable to infer that welfare relationships between them was mostly one of indifference, or neglect. The most that can be said is that there is very little evidence about the transference of goods and money; but such things as gifts of firewood, vegetables, occasional visits, cannot automatically be excluded on the grounds of lack of evidence.

1. K.A.O. P371/12/5-6
2. K.A.O. P99/12/1

Three generational families have been discovered to be uncommon in Early Modern England, but there were, in every parish, families who remained static, never moving far from the place where they had a settlement. Most seemed to have been at the lower end of the social scale, and generation after generation some ended up as parish paupers and pensioners. Rate books, where they have survived, show many units of these families living in close proximity. Between 1710 and 1720 there were three generations of the Beard family, James the father, Abraham his son, and Abraham junior, his son, occupying three adjacent almshouses in Stone Street, Maidstone. James, a solitary widowed pensioner, was removed to the workhouse when it opened in 1720 and where he survived until he was nearly eighty. Abraham, the elder, occupied an almshouse by virtue of his position as town beadle; he died in a smallpox epidemic. Abraham junior was below average mentality and also went to the workhouse in 1720 where he died in his fifties a comparative young man. It is interesting that James' father, also called Abraham, died a parish pensioner in 1705 aged seventy-nine.⁽¹⁾ There is absolutely no reason to suppose that because no written evidence can be found that there was not a considerable amount of mutual support between these four generations of Beards who lived so close together.⁽²⁾

Similar stable families are to be found in all parishes.

1. K.A.O. P241/11/4-5

2. K.A.O. P241/11/3-5

Parishes had power to compel children, usually sons, to support an aged parent, and to enforce this by resorting to Quarter Sessions for a warrant. It would seem that this power was not exercised as often as it might have been.

Nicholas Jackson, husbandman of Maidstone, was ordered at the Easter sessions of 1688 to provide two shillings a week to support his mother, Anne Jackson, living in Boxley, 'he being well able to provide and she being old and poor'.⁽¹⁾

Humphrey and William Baldwin, sons of Thomas Baldwin of Wrotham, both living in East Kent, were the subjects of an order obtained by Wrotham in 1712. They were to support their father at two shillings a week, 'turn and turn about by the year'.⁽²⁾

Actions such as these two examples were uncommon. Those that have been found, show the justices in Sessions to have been more generous in their allowances than local justices, so it is possible the parishes avoided them except when no other way was successful.

The local justices gave smaller allowances, usually a shilling or one and six a week, and the warrant only cost a shilling. But ignoring the law and defaulting in payment was quite common, if the experience of Cranbrook is typical. An order was obtained by them against Daniel Gyles, living in Biddenden, to support his father, in 1728. Further warrants had to be procured in 1730 and 1731.⁽³⁾

1. K.A.O. Q/SB/20

2. K.A.O. Q/SB/31

3. K.A.O. P100/12/2

John Poyle ignored all attempts to make him support his mother Martha Poyle, who discharged herself from the Cranbrook workhouse on several occasions between 1729 and 1731, yet he only lived in Frittenden, an adjacent parish.⁽¹⁾

It may be conjectured from this limited evidence that parishes could not force children to support their parents, except by the expensive route through Quarter Sessions, while dealing with the matter on a local basis was a troublesome business. Neither did they force children to take their parents into their homes as lodgers. This is in accord with the findings of other researchers. Laslett, for example, found that out of a total of 211 men over sixty, in sixty-one pre-industrial English parishes, only eleven per cent (23 men) were living with their children and nine per cent (19 men) in lodgings. The rest were living with their wives. Out of 501 widows, seventeen per cent were living with their children (85 widows), four per cent in lodgings (20 widows), while the remainder were living as 'solitaries' but not necessarily as the sole occupant of a dwelling.⁽²⁾

An attempt has been made to analyse the relationships which prevailed between aged pensioners and their families from the very sparse information available in the overseers accounts. Contact of various kinds were found for only just over ten per cent of the total number of pensioners in the five parishes with named kinsmen. These were daughters,

1. K.A.O. P100/12/2

2. Laslett. *Family Life*. op. cit. p 198-199

sons-in-law, sons, and very occasionally, with brothers or sisters. For this exercise, spouses have been excluded. Overseers accounts also record contacts with other named individuals who provide occasional services, or who act as landlords or landladies. These may or may not be kin. They have also been excluded. Widow Lucy Lomas, for example, of Tonbridge was lodged firstly with John Head, then with John Ashdowne and finally with a Dame Roberts, between 1772 and 1776. Since it has not been possible to establish any degree of kinship among them, they have been ignored.⁽¹⁾

The results obtained are shown in Table 7.1. Occasional assistance is inclusive of such actions as doing repairs at the officers' request, occasional nursing, collecting pensions or dealing with the Vestry on the parent's behalf. Since only those established as kin are included, there are good grounds for believing that occasional assistance was far more widespread but there appears to be no way of showing its true extent at present. The small percentage of aged who actually lived with kin was not unexpected. Most lived with daughters, a few sisters lived together, but no example of a father living with son or daughter was found.

The conclusion must be that there was just as little co-residence among the very poor as there was among the population as a whole.

While no male pensioners were found to be co-residing with their children, quite a number of them were found to

1. K.A.O. P371/12/5; TR 2451/1-2

Table 7.1

TABLE SHOWING EXTENT OF FAMILY SUPPORT

PARISH	TOTAL NUMBER OF PENSIONERS	LIVING WITH FAMILY	RECEIVING OCCASIONAL AID
Cowden	100	9 (9.0%)	3 (3.0%)
Cranbrook	260	8 (3.0%)	8 (3.0%)
Maidstone	295	16 (5.1%)	20 (6.8%)
Tonbridge	204	19 (9.0%)	11 (5.4%)
Wrotham	194	17 (8.7%)	1 (0.6%)
TOTAL	1053	average 69 (6.9%)	average 43 (3.7%)

Sources: Overseers Accounts
Own analysis from Pensioners
Biographical details

have wives who were considerably younger, and to have had several small children. At least six pensioners were in this position, and there may be more who, with the work capability of the wives taken into account, remained outside the parish relief system. These have not been included in the assessment but the evidence lends support to Laslett's conclusion that the only safeguard old men had against a lonely old age was to remarry as soon as, or shortly after, a wife died.⁽¹⁾

Paupers of quite advanced age married and produced children without it apparently affecting their pension status. Richard Wimshurst of Cranbrook, blind, married as his second wife, Dorothy Buckland in 1669 when he was fifty-six. She died a year later, leaving him with an infant son. A third marriage took place within eight months, but where it took place or the wife's name is not ascertainable. It lasted for eight years, during which time the third wife cared for her husband and his child. They received fairly generous treatment from the parish until Old Wilmshurst died in 1693 aged eighty. The parish then considered its responsibility to be at an end and paid no further relief to the wife. Possibly, since there is no record of the marriage in the Cranbrook registers, she must have had a settlement in another parish and was removed, a common device for dealing with young widows who had no children.⁽²⁾ The son, Stephen, remained the responsibility of Cranbrook until of

1. Laslett. *The World we have Lost*. op. cit. p 104
2. K.A.O. P100/12/1. Appendix A2.5

an age to work.

The same parish behaved quite differently with regard to Old Richard Hollands and his young wife and child. As soon as he appealed for relief in 1704, at the age of sixty-five, the parish obtained a removal order to convey him and his family to Aylesford, a parish some twelve miles distant. Aylesford appealed to Quarter Sessions; the order was quashed and the family returned to Cranbrook. Holland now received a pension which continued until his death in 1709, aged seventy. Widow and child were immediately removed, and no more was heard of them.⁽¹⁾

It would appear from these two cases that Cranbrook parishf was not prepared to undertake the maintenance of the young wives of pensioners and their young children. This was an expense that could go on for years. The treatment of Old Richard Hollands is less acceptable. He was undoubtedly born in Cranbrook in 1639. His first wife had given birth to twins in 1684, one of whom was still living in Cranbrook, though unmarried and probably in service.⁽²⁾ The most likely reason for the parish attempting to remove Old Hollands is that he left the parish for a few years, probably to work in Aylesford, giving them an opportunity to act under the Settlement Laws.

The meagre evidence which it has been possible to assemble is a clear indication that, in general, the support which was forthcoming to the aged from their families was

1. K.A.O. P100/12/2
2. K.A.O. TR/495/2-4

small. This is the evidence of the demographers and it has been borne out by the paucity of evidence of family support in overseers accounts. This is not surprising. Their children were not there to support them. Most parents, if they were poor, and produced a number of children, watched them either die, or leave home one by one, leaving them to face a lonely old age, in poverty, when one partner died. If one child was left in the parish, in most cases they would be just as poor as their parents, once they got married and set up their own households, and be unable to contribute much to maintenance.

Charity forms the final link in the network of supportive services for the old. That is the substance of the final section of this chapter.

CHARITY

Loaves of bread or small sums of money, available under the terms of a charitable trust, or as a single donation under the terms of a will, were as much a part of the parish resources for the relief of the aged as were the pension, free fuel and the payments of rent. Some donors left tightly structured trusts, providing for recipients who fulfilled certain well defined criteria. Others left foundations varying from rent charges, to rents on land or other forms of investment which provided a small annual income, which was under the control of the Vicar, Churchwardens and other parish officers. Occasionally donors left a sum of money to build one or more almshouses. Unless they also left sufficient funds for their maintenance, in course of time they just became part of the general stock of free parish housing for the poor.

In some parishes, such as Tonbridge and Maidstone, there were a large number of charities, and the income, in whatever form, made a significant difference to what the officers could achieve in relief. Elsewhere, where income and almshouses were lacking, as in Cranbrook, the role of charity was negligible.

The word, 'Charity', often has vague connotations, even undesirable overtones in the history of the Old Poor Law. It is proposed, therefore, to discuss its role and influence, first by analysing the various forms of charity as they affected the aged, then to question what this influence actually was, and finally to compare the conclusions

reached, on the basis of the local evidence, with certain long standing beliefs about the importance of the role it played. There will be two sections. One concerned with endowments which provided annual income or almshouses lasting over a long period of time; the second will range over various forms of indiscriminate giving, and an attempt to place it within the context of poor relief for the old in general.

CHARITABLE ENDOWMENTS

A factor constantly to be borne in mind in connection with charitable endowments is that there may also be documentary evidence of the donor's intention, in the form of a will or as deeds drawn up at the time of the proposal; these are regrettably not always sufficient evidence that the charity actually came into existence or existed long enough to have produced any benefit to the group originally provided for.

Robert Rowland of Maidstone, for example, left a hundred and twenty pounds in his Will in 1707, to be invested to produce an income of four pounds annually. This was to be distributed each year among the aged persons occupying the almshouses on either side of the main bridge over the Medway. Within a few years the money vanished and the charity was lost.⁽¹⁾

Cranbrook was endowed with four almshouses by an

1. Report of Charity Commissioners on Kentish Charities.
1817-1819. p 508

unknown donor in the middle of the sixteenth century. From 1660, at least, one was occupied by the parish clerk, another by the Master of the charity school, neither paying any rent.⁽¹⁾

Following the opening of the workhouse in 1726, Tonbridge parish began letting some of its numerous almshouses for rent.⁽²⁾

It cannot, therefore, be taken for granted that a founder's original intentions to benefit the aged were always carried out.

On the other hand, Fisher's Charity in Maidstone, founded 1670 as four cottages on St. Faith's Green, to be occupied by four poor, hard-working widows, remained in their original position until the middle of the nineteenth century. Growing pressure for a new Church forced re-building elsewhere, but the charity still continues under its original terms.⁽³⁾

Every charity thus requires investigation to make sure that it did not remain only on paper in the donor's will or deed of covenant. Twentieth century writers on charity and the Old Poor Law appear to draw a sharp distinction between their respective roles. From the evidence which has survived for the West Kent region, there were no clear cut divisions between them. The introduction of compulsory rating did not rule out philanthropy. The latter was to be absorbed into

1. K.A.O. P100/12/1

2. K.A.O. P371/12/4

3. Charity Commissioners (Kent). p366

the general framework of poor relief, and legislation passed at the same time redefined benevolence to suit its new role.⁽¹⁾ No longer a purely religious exercise, carried out more for the benefit of the donor's soul rather than for the amelioration of poverty as such, it would in future become an instrument of social policy. Philanthropy continued to be encouraged, and the new legislation aimed to protect endowments from fraud and mal-administration. The extent of relief achievable by municipal effort alone, could thus be expanded by voluntary effort. Charitable foundations, not governed by strict rules of administration, became part of the general apparatus of relief; while occasional giving, subscriptions, donations in wills and gifts to individual aged could be used to underpin the network of relief measures at critical points.

This view differs in some important respects from that held by one of the most distinguished and prolific writers on English Philanthropy⁽²⁾ and from the critics of the Old Poor Law⁽³⁾. The evidence for West Kent does not give an impression of a network of entirely repressive procedures, permitting the local officers to relieve the aged at the barest minimum, while the humanitarian efforts of local benefactors tempered the severity from time to time.

Jordan's view is that charity formed the main thrust of all efforts to relieve poverty in Kent. He has established

1. Statute of Charitable Uses. 43 Elizabeth I c 4 (1601)

2. W.K. Jordan. op. cit.

3. S. & B. Webb. Poor Law. op. cit. pp 320-340

that the great flood of benefactions for the care of the poor came during the early Stuart era, and his investigations end in 1640, which relate his conclusions to the century before our period opens. He adds the rider, however, that though the flow of funds into endowments was sharply lessened after the Civil War, the golden age of charity giving for poor relief was over, not because of any political or economic convulsions, but because the great generosity of the period 1485-1640 had made provision so adequate that the normal requirements of poor relief had been met. Private charity in Kent had, during the course of a century, freed the common man from hopeless poverty.⁽¹⁾

The implication seems to be that the outpouring of charity from 1485 to 1640 not only met the needs of the poor in that period, but also overcame the poverty of the following century and a half. If this thesis has been correctly interpreted, his work on Kentish charities has a particular relevance to this study and requires close analysis. His main thesis was that the unorganised church controlled alms giving of pre-Reformation England was ineffective and had collapsed, to be replaced in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries by a positive attack on poverty, spearheaded by the growing merchant class and to a much lesser extent by local gentry. In the case of Kent, most of the benefactors were London merchants with local connections. Municipal activities were assumed to be present

1. Jordan. op. cit. pp 3-18

but were unimportant, not intended to be continuous, but to be activated when private giving proved inadequate.⁽¹⁾

The core of the evidence used by Jordan in his study was provided by all the wills proved in the Consistory and Archdeaconry Courts of Canterbury and Rochester, supplemented by material from other depositories.

The mass of statistics generated in this way was analysed in various ways, according to the ends to which the charities were direct. He isolated five objectives, only one of which was the relief of the poor. Discussion will concentrate only on this. Out of the massive sum of over a quarter of a million pounds raised for Kent alone, of this only just over a fifth, or £50,279, was invested in the form of capital endowments for the relief of the poor. Jordan himself acknowledged that endowments were very unevenly spread across the County, only eighty-seven of its four hundred parishes acquiring endowments in excess of one thousand pounds.⁽²⁾ Poverty, he believed, was much less acute in Kent than elsewhere in England, since its economy was balanced and resilient, its agriculture having few blighted areas while the numerous small industries recovered rapidly from any downturn in trade.⁽³⁾

These conclusions are difficult to reconcile with, for example, the obvious widespread poverty revealed by the Hearth Tax of 1664 in some Kentish parishes, and the large

1. Jordan. *op. cit.* Preface p VI

2. *Ibid.* p 16

3. *Ibid.* p 17-18

sums being spent in poor relief. Over and above the most common criticisms levelled at Jordan, that he failed to take into account the effects of inflation, price rises and rising population⁽¹⁾, it would seem that he has also failed to make the necessary distinction between 'relief from destitution', which was the ancient role of charity, and 'relief of poverty', which would have required massive on-going benevolence and an associated policy of social welfare, not a slowing down of effort, if charity was the main instrument in the relief of poverty.

It has been argued in this study that poor relief for the aged was a network of provisions, dovetailed together to provide a standard of care no better, but no worse than other younger poor families. Charity assumed a greater or lesser share of the support depending on the number and value of the endowments, and the generosity of the community at any particular time. Jordan's contention that the period of enlightenment on which he had concentrated, a period of benevolence unprecedented before or after, had solved the problem of poverty requires further analysis to measure the true impact, and to reconcile the differing viewpoints where possible.

Jordan's estimate of £50,279 for the relief of the poor can be broken up as follows:

1. Coleman Thesis 303
A. Everitt. Review of Social Institutions in Kent in
Economic History Review. 2nd series. Vol. XV.2. 1962/3
p 376

For Building Almshouses	£44,614
General Charity (money, bread, clothing, pensions)	£ 5,068
For aged poor	£ 597
	<hr/>
Total	£50,279 ⁽¹⁾

In assessing the impact of Professor Jordan's endowments on real poverty, the assumption is made that all the charities came into being and were fully effective. Jordan has himself admitted that some of these charities were 'mysteriously lost'.⁽²⁾

Nearly ninety per cent went on building almshouses. Allowing £30 as the cost of building an almshouse, this would amount to just under 1,500 almshouses spread over the four hundred Kentish parishes, about four per parish. Bearing in mind what has been previously stated that endowments with trustees and criteria of admission automatically excluded many of the pauper aged, the benefits were thus small. The distributive charities spread out over the county amount to £11.6.0. a year for each parish, or just under five shillings a week, enough to cover the needs of perhaps three pensioners. By 1640, the date at which Jordan's investigations end, Cowden, the smallest parish concerned in this study, was already disbursing twenty-five pounds a year in poor relief.⁽³⁾

Jordan's view that benevolent free giving was more

1. Jordan. op. cit. p 16
2. Ibid. p 20
3. K.A.O. P99/12/1

important than poor relief before 1640 may be true for some parts of Kent and elsewhere in the country, when the new system was in its infancy. The vagueness of the provisions of the 43.Elizabeth can be interpreted as an understanding that it was not to be continuous provision, but was to be activated when private giving proved inadequate. This is how it seemed to work in some regions, for example in Cambridgeshire⁽¹⁾, and the West Derby Hundred⁽²⁾. In a few counties, Caernarvonshire and Anglesea in particular, it was found not necessary to levy rates until 1776.⁽³⁾ These conditions did not prevail in West Kent and rates were found to be essential from the start.

While the value of the capital endowments gathered by Jordan have been shown to be very small when averaged out by parishes, little weight is given in his exposition of the social and economic changes which were already under way in Kent by 1640, and which would produce greater effects on poverty levels than he had envisaged; such as the decline of the cloth and iron industries, with only slow replacement by others, rising population, rising prices and inflation. He maintains that the tide of generosity receded after 1640, but this did not matter since poverty had been conquered. The real probability is that while over the next two centuries the population doubled⁽⁴⁾, prices rose by over

1. Hampson. Cambridgeshire. pp 28-30; p 40

2. Oxley. West Derby Hundred. op. cit. p 100

3. Parl. Papers. Report. Select Committee on Poor Laws 1818
p 7.

4. Chalklin. Kent. op. cit. p 27

five times.⁽¹⁾

These factors are brushed aside, the reason being given that though an inflationary process was at work, its effect would be minimised by the continuing endowments being made and the rising value through inflation of those already in existence.⁽²⁾ This is precisely what did not happen to the Kentish charities already in existence in 1640. William Hewitt's Charity in Maidstone was established in 1568, well within Jordan's period. It consisted of a rent charge of £2.13.4. on lands in the parish. Three hundred years later in 1817 the income was still unchanged.⁽³⁾ Parish officers had never taken advantage of rising land values to maintain the value of the charity. Sulham's Charity, a rent charge on Selby's Farm, Leigh, founded 1578, three pounds per year, remains unchanged to the present day.⁽⁴⁾

In directing attention to the generosity displayed in the large trusts and bequests as originally conceived in the period 1480-1640, Jordan has carried out a valuable historical exercise. The bequests contained in themselves, however, no information about the social and economic conditions of the period, and to use his broad statistical analyses for the purposes of making generalisations about

1. From D. Knoop and G.P. Jones. *The Medieval Man*. London 1933 quoted in Burnett. *History of Cost of Living*. London 1961. op. cit. p 61

cf. Phelps Brown. Index of Prices	1481	100
	1700	591
	1789	824

2. Jordan. op. cit. p 22

3. Charity Comm.(Kent) 1817 p369

4. Ibid. p 511 and conversation with present owner

the extent and relief of poverty seems invalid in the light of his failure to take into account rising price levels and to relate his figures to them. No attempt has been made either to ascertain the survival rates of those charities he includes, except to refer in passing to one small charity which was 'mysteriously lost' about a century after its founding.⁽¹⁾ Attacks on capital endowments were not uncommon. Carelessness in administration, appropriation of funds by both trustees and parish officers, meant that some endowments disappeared very quickly.

The considerable sum of money devoted to the building of almshouses has already been shown to be somewhat misleading but the effectiveness of these charities was further curtailed if the donor failed to provide an adequate income for their upkeep. The foundation in many instances consisted of just sufficient money to build a few dwellings, many little better in construction than those already described in Chapter Three. In twenty years these almshouses were themselves additional burdens on the ratepayers. John Brightling's Charity in Tonbridge consisted of £60 left by will in 1648 to build two dwellings for two aged labouring men. No income was provided and by 1681 they were so dilapidated that the parish had to spend twenty pounds to make them habitable again.⁽²⁾

Many almshouses, built through the generosity of local

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1. Jordan. op. cit. p 20. Orchard Charity, Monkton founded 1581 lost by 1681.
 2. K.A.O. P371/12/1

benefactors during the hundred and fifty years covered in Jordan's researches, would have reached the end of their useful lives long before his period had expired. Six almshouses in Pudding Lane, Maidstone, built in the late fifteenth century, were demolished in 1603 by the Corporation as being 'ruinous, very old and dangerous for fear of fire'.⁽¹⁾ These are included in Jordan's analysis as being still in place.

There was undoubtedly an enormous outpouring of humanitarian generosity before 1640, and full credit is due, but in making the assumption that it was adequate to cure poverty, less than merited credit is given to the benevolence that continued in the centuries after 1640. In the emphasis given to the London merchants, the role played by the local gentry and landowners has been seriously diminished.⁽²⁾ While Kentish estates were constantly being purchased by men from London, there was a large core of gentry who had been resident in the County for many generations, who were an integral part of its social and political life and who were closely involved in poor relief in their roles as justices, either locally or in Quarter Sessions. Such families had untold opportunities for both recorded and unrecorded acts of charity; from the setting up of capital endowments to single acts of kindness which could never be measured statistically.

1. Maidstone Records. Maidstone 1926. Burghmote Book IV. p37
2. Jordan. *op. cit.* Preface p VII

All Charitable Donations, large and small, long term or short term, had a part to play in easing the lot of the aged. Taken together, as an instrument of policy, they added to the spread of ameliorative procedures at the disposal of the parish officers. It was left to their discretion which combination was chosen, to suit both the recipient and the parish.

The only way of estimating the real impact of charity on the welfare of the aged poor in our five parishes is to look closely at the charities themselves; what they consisted of, whether almshouses, doles of money, bread or clothing; their annual value, that is, income; and what were the criteria of benefit.

For the five parishes in question, the relevant information has been abstracted from Jordan's own analysis, in which his trusts and bequests are analysed according to their primary objectives, such as education, social rehabilitation, poor relief. The table prepared, Table 7.2, shows only the total value of those benefactions directed towards poor relief and the annual income derived from them. This has the disadvantage that the total value as envisaged by Jordan includes not only capital endowments in place in 1640, but also all single gifts found in wills or other documents from 1485 to 1640, that is, all amounts given for immediate expenditure. This, said Jordan, accounted for the largest number of benefactions.⁽¹⁾ He has also included all

1. Jordan. op. cit. p 9

Table 7.2

VALUE OF CAPITAL ENDOWMENTS AND ANNUAL
INCOME DIRECTED TOWARDS POOR RELIEF ONLY
 (1640. After Jordan)

PARISH	VALUE (£ s)	ANNUAL INCOME (£ s)
Cowden	-	-
Cranbrook	539 00	26 08
Maidstone	1244 10	62 02
Tonbridge	2497 08	124 08
Wrotham	106 00	5 03
TOTAL	4387 03	218 03

foundations no longer functioning because of mismanagement, and some almshouses demolished through age. This distorts the real value of the analysis to some extent and the true value of the charities is less than indicated. Nevertheless, the table shows clearly the uneven nature of charitable giving and the difficulties in accepting Jordan's thesis about the prime role of charity in the relief of poverty.

These charities provided an annual income of £218, most of which went to Maidstone and Tonbridge. The individual charities which provided this income are included in the lists of charities which have been traced for these two parishes, and which are found at the end of the chapter.⁽¹⁾ The value and income of these charities should be compared, as far as is possible, with the analysis presented in Table 7.3 which shows the value, objectives and income of the charities of these parishes as found at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

A true comparison is not possible since the income listed in Table 7.3 does not cover single charitable payments, while the almshouse income refers only to those endowments which were accompanied by an annual income, either for maintenance of the fabric or the occupants, sometimes both. Almshouses built by the parishes, or which were endowed without income, formed the bulk of the housing available for the old and were not accounted for in the Charity Commissioners Report.⁽²⁾ Cowden's almshouses were

1. Tables 7.4 and 7.5

2. Charity Comm. op. cit. p 511

Table 7.3

ANNUAL INCOME FROM CHARITIES DEVOTED TO POOR 1817

PARISH	GROSS INCOME (£ s)	INCOME FOR POOR (£ s)	OBJECTIVE
Cowden	1 00	1 00	Distribution of money
Cranbrook	39 15	4 05 35 10	Almshouses Distribution of money
Maidstone	1485 00	637 00 539 00 309 00	Almshouses Bread and clothing Money
Tonbridge	104 18	44 16 60 02	Bread Money
Wrotham	219 02	199 16 19 06	Almshouses Money

Source: Report of Charity Commissioners on Kent
Charities (1819)

of this type, and were constantly in need of repair which had to be carried out at parish expense.⁽¹⁾

Ending one's days in a well built almshouse, well maintained and with a small garden, even an income, was a privilege accorded to only a few. Most pauper labourers or their widows seldom met the criteria set by the donor, or were thought 'undeserving' by the trustees or the parish authorities. The choice of an inmate when vacancies occurred in an endowed almshouse was always a matter of selection after local worthies' recommendations and interview.⁽²⁾ There is no record anywhere that has been discovered which indicated a pensioner being removed from a pension list to occupy such an almshouse. It seems unlikely, therefore, that when Brenchley's Charity was endowed at the end of our period in 1789, that any of Maidstone's old male pensioners would be chosen to occupy one of the four brick built cottages, including a garden and five shillings a week.⁽³⁾

The income of just over four pounds tabulated for Cranbrook related to Hayworth's Charity, founded in 1726. The four almshouses built by the charity were to be occupied by four respectable widows receiving no money from poor relief. The income of one pound a year from the charity was insufficient for their keep and other resources must have been available.⁽⁴⁾

1. K.A.O. P99/12/1

2. B. Hill. Eighteenth Century Women. An Anthology. London 1984. pp 164-165

3. Charity Comm. op. cit. p 511

4. Ibid. p 508

A final example of such a charity is Petley's Charity of Tonbridge. George Petley left two hundred pounds by will in 1704, to build six almshouses, to be occupied by six aged persons, who had been honest, industrious and laborious; who were frequenters of the Church and regular partakers of the Lord's Supper.⁽¹⁾

Those aged, and there were many, who did not fulfil such criteria thus found themselves in whatever accommodation the parish could provide, unless the parish was prepared to continue to pay their rent. This often happened until a parish house became available where, as has been seen, they had to share with others, occasionally in the most wretched conditions.⁽²⁾

The charities from which the aged benefitted most were those numerous small charities, such as rent charges, or the rents of small parcels of land left to be controlled by the Vicar and Churchwardens. The income was distributed in the form of bread, small sums of money, clothing or wheat. Distribution took place usually on Sundays in the Church porch, on Saints' Days, often at Christmas time. The association with the church was probably because it was the most convenient time and place, but possibly also so that some measure of control could be exercised over the recipients. These were also the occasions when the support given by children often becomes visible, sons or daughters being allowed to collect their parent's share.

1. Charity Comm. op. cit. p 511

2. See Chapter Three pp 76 ff

These individual small benefactions that have survived are listed for Maidstone and Tonbridge. During the eighteenth century there must have been considerably more. A report of an investigation into the state of the Tonbridge charities, carried out in 1866-1868, drew attention to the large number of small charities, at least forty in number, which were known to have been lost through the carelessness of churchwardens.⁽¹⁾

Few records of these distributions have survived, so it is not possible to make an estimate of exactly how much each pensioner received. The young poor also received their share and other gifts made at the time of distribution could swell the amount given to each. Cowden's sole charitable foundation, Pelsett's Gift, was the rent of a small parcel of land. Being only one pound a year it was distributed bi-annually.⁽²⁾ The overseers' accounts for 1757 and 1759 contained a detailed list of all the poor who received sums of money. The total distributed greatly exceeded the value of the charity since the list contained thirty names, all of whom received between a shilling and two and sixpence. Voluntary subscriptions and gifts of food greatly enhanced the giving.⁽³⁾ The parish had eight pensioners at this time and all eight appeared on the lists.⁽⁴⁾ .

Most of these small charities were intended to assist all the poor of a parish, so only a trickle of the benefits

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1. Tonbridge Chronicle. July 12th 1868
 2. K.A.O. P99/12/2. Charity Comm. p 508
 3. Charity Comm. p 511
 4. K.A.O. P99/12/2

found its way to the old. This is what one should expect since they amounted to only a small percentage of the pauper population of the parish. Nevertheless, they are never missing from any distribution list that has survived. It seems likely that it will never be known exactly how much they received, but it is a fair assumption that what they got could make quite a difference to their standard of living, since their names appeared not only on lists of donations from regular charities, but also receiving small shares of casual gifts. This will receive more attention later in the chapter.

A close study of the parish records make the fact clear that far more was actually being distributed in bread and money than was actually declared in periodic inspections made by such bodies as the Charity Commissioners. To use the example of Maidstone: the Commissioners Report for Kent (1817-1819) referred to the parish as distributing bread to the value of nine pounds yearly.⁽¹⁾ This corresponds exactly to the sum to be distributed in bread under Gunsley's Charity, founded in 1618. The Maidstone Bread Book, on the other hand, contained details of all Bread Charities, dates of inception, annual income, sizes of loaves and when to be distributed. This shows that in 1817, the year the Commissioners inspected the charities, bread to the value of £138.17.7, amounting to two hundred and twenty loaves a week, was actually distributed, together with an unknown

1. Charity Comm. p 511

quantity by the Mayor, the proceeds of fines.⁽¹⁾ Many payment vouchers for the poor's bread survive for Maidstone. In 1660, fifty threepenny loaves were given out at the Church door each Sunday. Each weighed three pounds.⁽²⁾ This rose to a weekly total of two hundred and fifty by 1800.⁽³⁾

Since documents relating to the many small money charities of Maidstone cannot be traced, any discrepancy between the Report and the reality cannot be assessed. But if Tonbridge was at all typical, there could have been considerable loss through carelessness.

A large amount of bread was also distributed at the Church doors each Sunday in Tonbridge, though there was no Mayor to augment the number of loaves. By 1750, one hundred and thirty fourpenny loaves and four hundred twopenny loaves were distributed annually. There were also those charities from which the poor, including the aged, received small sums of money and, less often, clothing. Head's and Goodhugh's Charities, amounting to ten pounds between them, were given to the poor on Christmas Day. On the few lists of recipients which survive, the aged pensioners, as usual, were prominent receiving sums of between a shilling and five shillings.⁽⁴⁾ As in the case of Cowden, the distributions were swollen by gifts of money, food or clothing.⁽⁵⁾ .

1. Maidstone Bread Book. K.A.O. P241/25/14-15

2. K.A.O. P241/11/1

3. K.A.O. P241/25/14-15

4. K.A.O. P371/12/4-5

5. Ibid.

This section has attempted to show that the role assigned to charitable foundations by the late Professor W.K. Jordan in the relief of poverty, is not borne out by the evidence from those parishes which are being scrutinised here.

Depending on the income derived, institutional charities under the control of the parish officers, had a valuable role to play in easing the lot of the aged. How big a role it really was cannot be assessed, partly through inadequate documentation. It certainly falls far short of the role assigned to it by Jordan. Income varied widely from place to place, Cowden, Cranbrook and Wrotham having little or nothing, whereas Tonbridge and Maidstone were richly endowed.

It is all too easy to become preoccupied with trusts and bequests which can be verified by wills, deeds of gifts, but in so doing, whole areas of unrecorded acts of benevolence are left aside and it is to these that attention will be directed in the final section of this chapter.

Table 7.4.

MAIDSTONE CHARITIES

Donor & Date	Form of Endowment	Value per Year	Recipients	Distributed
Wm. Hewitt 1567	Rent Charge	£2.16.4 added yearly to bread account	Poor of Maidstone	Churchwardens Overseers
Cutts 1602	Rent Charge	£2.12.0.	Poor in bread	As above
Gunnesley's 1618	Rents on land	£7.0.0.	To the poor in bread	
Unknown	House and land in Boxley	£9.0.0.	By 1817 was bread contributing £62 to the bread account	As above
Bell's and Rose's Charities 1775	Bread Interest on £10 Interest on £100	?	Bread on Xmas Day	
Other unknown bread charities. By 1800 all distributed in bread. Total income from all these came to £138.17.4.				
Fishers 1760	By Will	£8.0.0.	For the relief each year of 4 poor widows of honest behaviour	Trustees
Banks 1697	By Will 6 Almshouses	£60 a year towards maintenance of inmates and property	For male and female occupants each to have £10 a year in quarterly instalments. No charge on parish	Trustees
3 Almshouses 1727	3 Dwellings		For 3 maiden gentlewomen of Kent or London, well-born but become poor through misfortune, having lived virtuous lives as dissenters plus £10 per annum, 1/2 chaldron coal	Trustees
Alms Gift	Augmented 1817	By a gift of £1,000		
Alms 1736	By Will 6 good brick almshouses	Rents to keep in repair	For use and habitation of 6 poor ancient persons, 3 poor men (bachelors or widowers) 3 poor women, widows or spinsters, each to be aged 55 or over plus £8 a year each	Trustees
Brenchley's	By Will 4 Almshouses	£18.0.0.	2 men and 2 women unmarried, all to be over £60 plus £3 a quarter each	Trustees

Maidstone had many almshouses, origin unknown, some dating from 14th or 15th centuries, possibly contribution of guilds. In 1782, many in a ruinous condition

2 Week Street, 3 West Street, 4 King Street, 2 High Street

Many other houses in the town were under the control of the overseers and occupied by paupers.

12 disappeared in 1720 to provide a site for Workhouse

6 fell down in Pudding Lane, 1690

TONBRIDGE CHARITIES AFFECTING OLD

Donor & Date	Form of Endowment	Value per Year	Recipients	Distributed by
Sulham's 1578	Rent Charge	£3.0.0.	2s.0d. annually to 30 poorest, oldest, most infirm	Churchwardens Overseers
Lampards 1593	Rent Charge	£16.0.0.	£8 to poorest in Tonbridge £4 to poorest in Hildenbore £4 to poorest in Tunbridge Wells	As Above
By 1817 200 poor	receiving bread regularly from this charity			
Mr Thos. Smith 1621	Rents of land and houses	£10.8.0.	12 fourpenny loaves to 12 of poorest, most honest aged weekly. 1 outfit of clothing each Xmas (worth 20s.) Some to be resident in Southborough	As Above
Lightling's 1648	By Will 1. Two messuages 2. Rent charge	£60 no income £2.12.0.	For the use of 2 poor aged and needy, hard working and honest when labouring 6 twopenny loaves to 6 poor people each week	As Above
Arde's 1665	Tithes on grain	£20	To be distributed in small sums of not more than 5s. to poor inhabitants on 21 Dec.	As Above
By 1817 recipients	only getting 4d. each.			
ark's 1675	2 cottages and land plus 3 acres later		To house two widows. Parish to pay rent of £1.10.0. p.a. for 25 years, then to claim outright possession for further £55	As Above
By: Rent received by parish for hiring land, stables etc.	regularly exceeded outgoings. Became site for new Workhouse in 1726.			
ffington's 1695	£210 by Will to buy land for rent	£10.4.0.	12 fourpenny loaves each Sunday for the 12 most poor and aged of the Town and Hildenboro', labourers who had been regular churchgoers.	As Above
oodhugh's 1700	Rent charge	£2.0.0.	To be distributed to poor aged and infirm of good character in sums of 1s0d and 2s0d.	As Above
George Hooper 1694	? of limited life (until death of all recipients)	£5.0.0.	5s0d yearly to 20 poor people who lived in Tonbridge during his lifetime and who were named in his Will.	As Above
George Petley 1704	By Will 6 Almshouses To house husband and wife or two individuals	No income	For 12 most aged men and women honest, industrious, labourious people, frequenters of the church and partakers of the Lord's Supper	As Above
John Petley 1705	Rent Charge	£5.0.0.	6 fourpenny loaves to 6 poor ancient people of Tonbridge weekly	As Above

Table 7.5(2)

TONDRIDGE CHARITIES AFFECTING OLD

Date & Donor	Form of Endowment	Value per year	Recipients	Distributed
John Deakins	By Will 2 tenements divided into four	£50 No income	To house poor and infirm	Churchwardens Overseers
John Hooper 1708	Rent Charge out of 'White Swan'	£1.10.0.	To the poor of Tonbridge	As Above
Bristow's 1712	Rent Charge	£2.12.0.	6 twopenny loaves of good wheaten bread after Church on Sunday to 6 poor, aged persons	As Above
Geo.Children 1713	Rent Charge	£10.10.0.	12 fourpenny loaves of good wheaten bread after Church on Sunday: to 6 aged living in Tonbridge and 6 aged living in Hildenboro'	As Above
Unknown but possibly John Woodgate, conveyed in his lifetime (1745) and confirmed 1768	4 tenements adjoining churchyard		To house 4 old people	As Above
Holford's 1702	Rent Charge	£2.12.0.	6 twopenny loaves weekly	As Above
Samuel Mills	Investment £100 in 3% consols.	£3.0.0.	To be distributed in loaves for the poor every January 1st.	

The above list amounts to 16/18 almshouses

Every Sunday 18 twopenny loaves

42 fourpenny loaves

Annual distribution = 180 4d loaves or 360 2d loaves

Small sums of money about £47.10.0.

Clothing for 12 old people

The parish had several other almshouses in use, probably emanating from charities now lost
8 in East Street, 4 in Quarry Hill, 2 in Hildenborough (built by parish)

INDISCRIMINATE GIVING

Discussion of the supporting role of charity would not be complete without making some attempt to assess the part played by casual giving. Designed to produce immediate results, record keeping was of minor importance but this type of benevolence had been in existence for centuries, and continues still, varying from a meal given to a poor neighbour or subscribing to collections for the poor to help them face natural disasters. Evidence of its universality exists everywhere in records, not primarily intended as records of personal charity, from the Account Books of wealthy landowners to the diaries of minor clerics who watched their money carefully. The Rev. Giles Moore was Rector of Horsted Keynes, a rural parish not far from Tonbridge, and kept a diary for many years. In 1663 he recorded that he was accustomed each year to give to collections made at his door for the poor over and above his poor rates. Each year he gave between five and ten shillings for providing extra fuel or bread.⁽¹⁾

Three thousand pounds was raised by door to door collections in Maidstone in 1746. This was towards the repair of the homes of the poor who had suffered badly from the autumn floods, and to replace their furniture and clothing.⁽²⁾ As many of the parish almshouses were located on the flood prone land bordering the Medway, it is certain

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1. Extracts from the Diary of the Rev. Giles Moore, Rector of Horsted Keynes 1655-1679 from Sussex Archaeological Collections. Vol I p 249. Pub. Lewes 1848
 2. Russell. History of Maidstone. op. cit. p 379

that a considerable proportion of this enormous sum was used towards helping the aged who had suffered.

In 1782, the same parish made a collection of five hundred pounds to wipe out the overseers' deficit before applying for an Act to set up the Trustees of the Poor under Gilbert's Act.⁽¹⁾

Fines levied by magistrates for misdemeanors also proved a fruitful source of additional income for the old parish poor. Malling Petty Sessions levelled a fine of one pound on Phillip Detiller of Wrotham for using a gun during the time of Divine Service in November 1752. Half went to the poor of Wrotham.⁽²⁾

Similarly, half of a two pound fine levelled on Richard Sharp of Benenden for shooting a hare was handed over to the Cranbrook Churchwardens. This sum was distributed among sixteen poor parishioners (1675).⁽³⁾

These are not isolated examples of fines being used to relieve the poor. It was customary for half the total fine to go to the poor, while the other half went towards court expenses. Fines were levied for all manner of things, for being drunk in the street⁽⁴⁾, selling beer without a licence, game shooting⁽⁵⁾, swearing⁽⁶⁾. Taken as a whole, the fines,

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1. K.A.O. P241/11/14. Gilbert's Act 22 Geo. IIIc 83 Kent County Library Collection A54200. An Act for the Better Relief of the Poor in the Town and Parish of Maidstone, 1781.
 2. K.A.O. PS/Ma/1
 3. K.A.O. P100/5/1
 4. K.A.O. P241/11/3
 5. K.A.O. P406/12/4
 6. K.A.O. P100/12/3

the periodic door to door collections and other moneys received by the parishes could provide valuable additional benefit to the poor.

Single bequests in wills would also come to a considerable amount over a period of time. There are plenty of wills of this nature to be found in every parish but some examples from Tonbridge will serve to illustrate how the aged benefitted. Elizabeth Clarke, who had already in her lifetime given two dwellings and land to be used for the benefit of the poor, left five pounds in her will in 1680 to be distributed among the most aged and most needy women of the parish.⁽¹⁾

George Hooper, the elder, left five pounds in his will in 1743 to be distributed among the poor who attended his funeral and twelve pence each to his poor neighbours who dwelt in East Lane also known as Mill Lane.⁽²⁾ The parish had four almshouses in close proximity to Hooper's residence.

Elizabeth Walters similarly gave forty shillings in 1718 to be shared among forty poor old widows living in Tonbridge and the village of Shipbourne.⁽³⁾

One final example concerns the ten pounds left by James Eldridge in 1745 to the poor of Tonbridge parish. The overseers accounts for 1746 record the names of all those who received money from this source; one hundred and ten in all had sums varying from sixpence to ten shillings. The

1. Rochester Wills XXV 539r (1680)
2. Rochester XXXVI f179 (1743)
3. Rochester XXXI f205 (1718)

current pensioners again figure prominently but every name on the list represents a family already on poor relief.⁽¹⁾ This suggests that the parish officers were carrying out donors' requests faithfully, as do all other surviving lists of recipients, and that the money was not being diverted to lessen the general expenditure.

Each parish had its annual cycle of festive occasions linked to the agricultural year; festivities associated with Church Saints' Days, and a host of irregular events connected with the rites of passage, with births, marriages or coming of age among prominent families; other parish feasts were connected with the King's birthday, installation of new bells or celebration of coronations. They all formed important links in the chain of support for the aged poor, and for many aged partaking in a feast would be the only occasions in which meat would be part of their diet. While the old might be excluded from the more active elements of the festivities by their infirmities, they were not denied their place in the hospitality which accompanied them, and to which many of the more affluent had contributed.

Christmas hospitality was a dominant feature of parish life in the Early Modern period and those whose diet was invariably poor would have had a particular appreciation of

1. K.A.O. P371/12/4

the lavish fare dispensed by local gentry and farmers.⁽¹⁾

There is no really systematic way of analysing the occasions when casual charity was given. Most has undoubtedly gone unrecorded, but whether it was a personal gift or part of the occasional good cheer of the parish, the old received their share and their lives were thereby that much improved.

While this chapter has drawn together many of the ways in which the parish relief possible from the rates was extended, either by self help, family support or from charitable sources, the real impact of these are impossible to determine. Inevitably they varied from parish to parish, from location to location within the parish, and from year to year. Changes in the economic and social environment could diminish or enhance the occasions for voluntary giving.

It is, however, reasonable to conclude that there were several ways in which the lives of parish pensioners were improved, though it has also been argued that they would not starve even if they had to depend on the pension alone.

This, and the preceding chapters, have presented and discussed the whole network of ameliorative measures which were at the disposal of Vestries and parish officers for the benefit of the aged poor. These ranged from doles of cash, to gifts of fuel and clothing, housing, health care and the

1. The frequency, variety and significance of such parish occasions are considered in detail in R.W.Malcolmson Popular Recreations in English Society 1700-1850 Cambridge. 1973

provision of work, among others.

The final chapter will attempt to draw all these diverse threads together and to see how far the questions and hypotheses posed in the earlier chapters have been answered.

CHAPTER EIGHT - CONCLUSIONS

The opening chapter of this dissertation drew attention to the fact that though several generations of historians of the Old Poor Law had subjected its workings to close scrutiny, and with ever more sophistication, the isolation and study of the experiences of those social groups most affected by its provisions had been passed over as subjects worthy of research. By taking as its theme the treatment of the aged poor between 1662 and 1795 in five selected West Kent parishes, this thesis is a small step towards rectifying the omission.

Since the research thus marked a departure from traditional approaches, there were no guidelines to follow, no ready made techniques of analysis and no body of evidence against which conclusions, derived from the local evidence, could be set and assessed. It is an important and significant element of this research, therefore, that it points to a new way of approaching traditional sources, new hypotheses have been tested and new techniques of analysis have had to be worked out. Insofar as they have been successful in this present context, they now provide a basis for new avenues of approach to overseers' accounts and other parish records. Real success will be measureable only when others take up further research using the tools developed here, which have been directed only at a limited area of West Kent.

Given the limitations of the sources, their weakness for statistical analysis, the conclusions reached are often

only tentative, sometimes little more than speculation. Where only impressionistic evidence existed before, they may represent an improvement and be closer to the truth. The methodology used here can open the way to more thorough examination of the problem in areas where the sources are less suspect than in West Kent. Then the conclusions reached here can be supported or qualified. Care has been taken to make allowances for imperfections in the sources, especially when used quantitatively and results have been underestimated rather than over-estimated.

Those key issues, central to any study of the Old Poor Law, have naturally had an important role in considering the experiences of the aged. These include, among others, the ubiquitous pension, and the roles of the family, the workhouse, and of charity. The administrative organisation, the questions of settlement, and of removal, have only a peripheral role insofar as they impinge on the treatment of the old. But there remains a whole range of questions about the aged and their position within the mechanisms of the Old Poor Law which have never been answered, and which this research attempted to provide. The conclusions reached do not always prove to be the same as those reached by previous writers.

In Chapter One, the main themes of the study, in the form of questions and hypotheses, were grouped to form three main categories, those concerning old age itself and the relationship of the aged with the community, including the

role played by them; secondly forms of relief available under the law, and thirdly relief measures from sources external to the municipal effort.

The main thrust of the thesis has been as follows. Poor relief for the old was an interplay between the intentions of the state at the centre and their interpretation by parish elites. The law had established the principle of a legal secular system of relief for the aged and however much the practice varied from area to area, from one time period to another, the principle remained. The aged poor had a legal and moral right to a marginal subsistence from their parishes, to be funded by local owners and occupiers of land, no matter how distasteful they might find it. Vestries and Overseers of the Poor did not, however, work in isolation, carrying out the provisions of the Elizabethan law as they saw them, but worked in close co-operation with other agencies and institutions, which seem to be quite unrelated to the relief of poverty. These included the Church, the Justices, both locally and in Quarter Sessions, Constables, with the families of the aged and with those bodies concerned with the control and distribution of local charitable foundations, and collectors of funds for specific purposes. By so doing, the whole community, in effect, formed a social network of supportive services for the benefit of the old. At the same time, they guarded acceptable social standards. These interlocking aspects - the organisation directly concerned with poor relief with the ameliorative functions of the other local bodies - seem

clear in the Kentish evidence. This has led to the important general conclusion that a dissertation concentrating only on the overseers' work would lead to a very narrow view of the workings of Poor Relief as a whole. Yet this has been the well trodden path of the historian of the Poor Law giving in general a picture of minimum relief growing out of an historic tradition of repression.

This view was best exemplified by Sidney and Beatrice Webb, who were of the opinion that state control of poor relief, and the institutionalisation of charity and other benefits, was a predetermined shift from traditional alms giving to social control and order. Further, they maintained that the whole history of poor law legislation was marked by laws of increasing severity, primarily directed towards the idle, but inevitably extended to all the poor, and which contained within them the visible framework of repression, the stocks, the whipping post, the House of Correction and, later, the prison-like workhouse. The local administration was relief by obligation and not by right. It was callous, inhuman, unnecessarily cruel and brutally demoralising.⁽¹⁾ The evidence of the Kentish sources appears to contradict this.

Before any answers could be extracted to the questions posed in Chapter One, attention had to be directed only to such material as related to the old alone. The case

1. S. & B. Webb. Old Poor Law. p23; pp154-166

histories which were prepared and the techniques developed to calculate an age at burial for those who had no baptismal entry have seemed successful in that they ensured that any source material used applied only to the aged. Though time consuming in themselves, they provided increased confidence in the conclusions and could constitute a useful tool for exploiting the records of other parishes.

An important outcome of searching out the numbers of identifiable aged was the evidence that they constituted only a small proportion of parish populations throughout the period of study, and this was extended to formulate the hypothesis, which would repay further investigation, that the vast majority of poor labourers kept themselves independent of poor relief. This might be a purely local feature, but it points to a more universal application in view of the low proportion of the over sixties in the population at any time between 1662 and 1795.⁽¹⁾ At the very least, the result suggests that contemporary tract writers exaggerated the poor's dependence on the poor law, and the conclusions of later historians, often based on these, are in need of some qualification.⁽²⁾

A considerable amount of research was directed towards making an assessment of the aged's role and condition, to their standard of living, the environment in which they lived out their last years, and how the parishes approached the question of their demise, since old age always

1. Wrigley and Schofield. op. cit. pp528-529
2. D. Marshall. op. cit. p7-12

terminates in death. No simple way could be found to categorise these aspects of the treatment of the aged, each parish relieving their own aged according to their traditional methods and to the amount of resources available to them. Certain basic provisions were common to all parishes, almshouse accommodation or the payment of rents, fuel in winter, clothing when necessary and, in addition, the supply or replacement of any possession that could constitute a need, from new beds or new household utensils to the repair of working tools like spinning wheels or the provision of new sickles or scythes. Though this 'relief in kind' has never acquired the importance of the 'pension', 'setting on work', or 'charity' in the eyes of historians, the conclusion has been reached that this aspect of the treatment of the old was of equal, if not of more, significance than the pension. The personal contact which it entailed between pauper and parish officer was the 'face' of the Old Poor Law. The sharing of accommodation, in whatever form, ensured that the aged, with few exceptions, did not live and die alone. It did not result in lavish expenditure, and by comparison with such few labourers inventories that have survived, the living conditions of the old were probably no worse, but no better, than their neighbours.

The aged were treated fairly; they had, and used, rights of appeal against injustice. ⁽¹⁾ No one was tainted

1. K.A.O. P233/8/1

with pauperism. The 'moral' pauper of Malthus and Bentham does not emerge from the pages of the overseers accounts examined in the present context. It would appear that the moral attitudes of late nineteenth and early twentieth century writers have carried the stigma of pauperism back from the nineteenth century to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and again forward to the twentieth century.⁽¹⁾ In contrast, it has been found that the regular face to face contact, essential to the organisation of the Old Poor Law, provided opportunities for small personal kindnesses which were more than the law required. Tonbridge parish, for instance, added wine, as sherry, to the diet of sick pensioners whether medical practitioners ordered it or not.⁽²⁾ The addition of 'treats' into the diet of aged inmates of Maidstone workhouse has also been noted.⁽³⁾ We may speculate about how many such actions among members of the community have gone unrecorded. It has also been concluded that though these aged pensioners were often alone and at the mercy of the parish, they were approached and treated in as seemly a manner as possible, nursed and given the appropriate medicines and buried decently.

A whole chapter has been devoted to an assessment of their nutritional standards. This was considered essential. In the first place they are closely linked to resistance to

1. G. Himmelfarb. The Idea of Poverty in England in the Early Industrial Age. London 1984. p79; p112; p143

2. K.A.O. P371/12/1; P371/12/4

3. K.A.O. P241/11/5

infection and consequent mortality. Secondly, it has been argued that the function of the pension was to provide food and only that, the two are thus closely related. Since it was reasonable to suppose that there might be occasions when pensioners were forced to depend on their pensions alone for sustenance, the discussion was directed towards estimating whether survival was possible in these circumstances. It was concluded that survival depended on the relationship between the size of the pension and the price of bread at any particular time. When bread was cheap or reasonable in price, a pension of one shilling and sixpence would ensure survival; providing a basic monotonous diet which lacked those essential additions providing protection against infection. These would have to come from elsewhere or slow deterioration of bodily reserves took place. In times of poor harvests and high prices, the pension was nowhere near adequate to provide for all the pensioner's needs. No attempt was made to give temporary pension rises. Instead, parishes made up the deficit with free distributions of bread or flour, the sale of these essentials at subsidised prices. Other foods, like rice or potatoes, were made available while private citizens, through donations of meat, flour, coal or subscriptions, provided more welcome support. Research for this chapter involved studying a large number of printed budgets and diets for the poor produced by well-meaning reformers of the seventeenth and eighteenth century. It has been shown, by personal experiment, that well-meaning

though they were intended to be, such diets would have led to rapid malnutrition, and probably death, if maintained for any length of time.

Some attempt was made to relate nutritional adequacy with mortality in the old, to test the assumptions of Wrigley and Schofield that even in years of very high prices, national mortality was raised only by a fifth, spread over three years, and then compensated for in the following year or two by an exceptionally low mortality.⁽¹⁾ The testing was somewhat unscientific because it concerned only the aged whose lives could be affected by a year or two at most, but it did appear to give support to the hypothesis.⁽²⁾

The pension was subjected to considerable quantitative analysis which produced several interesting conclusions. The vast majority of aged received between a shilling and two shillings a week, with eighteen pence being the most popular. Lower sums were indicative of other resources such as payment for work, bread or regular small sums from charity. Higher pensions included additional expenses, support of a spouse or offspring, payment of lodging, for medicines. Historical tradition has it that between 1662 and 1795 each parish was unique, following its own path and demonstrating intense parochialism.⁽³⁾ The constant similarities between all five in their practices contradict these views. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the size

1. Wrigley and Schofield. op. cit. p372-373

2. Table 4.2

3. S. & B. Webb. op. cit. p154; D. Marshall. op. cit. p6

of pensions and the ages at which they were given. The many opportunities for inter-parish discussions and the establishment of norms of practice have been discussed in the text.⁽¹⁾ No evidence has been found of pensioners or poor moving from poor parishes to richer to benefit themselves.

There was no one age at which the old became eligible for a pension. They supported themselves either fully or in part until the effects of sickness, handicap or old age overcame them. This resulted in a range of ages at which pensions were first received, most becoming entirely dependent on parish relief between the ages of sixty-five and seventy-five, while women became pensioners two or three years younger than men. As in the twentieth century, widows outlived their spouses often by many years. Two factors emerged which appear to be worth further exploration. The first is that despite the life long poverty and poor diet, a surprisingly high percentage continued to remain independent into their seventies and eighties. Secondly, Cranbrook's analysis shows that pensions were being received on average two years younger in males than in other parishes and three to four years younger in females. It may be speculated that this may indicate a link, however tenuously, between continuous and abject poverty and the ageing process.

The role of the workhouse in the treatment of the aged was given detailed attention, since in historical writings

1. See Chapter III

it has always occupied a central position. It has become part of twentieth century mythology always to think of workhouses as being filled with the aged. The eighteenth century workhouse philosophy was based primarily on three simple objectives, all economic; of easing the rates, increasing manufactures and placing the able-bodied to work, and not primarily as a poor house to house the aged, though separate provision could be provided for them. Most earlier writings on this institution were by those whose attitudes were shaped by their response to the treatment meted out to the aged inhabitants of the gaunt edifices of the late nineteenth century, which cast their shadows physically, psychologically and emotionally on all who came within their environment. Their dominant deterrent function affected even those who were never likely to become inmates.

Pre-reformed workhouses have been widely regarded as failures, not having achieved the original economic self-sufficiency which, ostensibly, was their original purpose. In following through this research, doubt has arisen as to whether this was the primary aim of supporters of the early workhouse movement, but imposed by the legislators of 1723. The original workhouse of 1696, founded by John Cary in Bristol and held up as the model for subsequent workhouses, had no such aim. It was opened for children and the aged housed in two separate establishments. The children were to be educated and were to work at some trade, under instructors, so as to be put into the position of earning

their own living. For the aged, the quarters were in the nature of an infirmary or hospital.⁽¹⁾ Re-assessment of workhouse philosophy is beyond the scope of this study, but it is a subject which merits further investigation.

The pragmatic approach customary by parishes in the presence of new problems was not lacking in the case of the workhouses. They could not dispose of these expensive structures whether leased or purpose built. As original objectives were seen to be untenable, as expense mounted, the parishes converted these new facilities to other uses. Where formerly sick strangers had to be lodged at high cost in taverns, there was now readily available accommodation. Their own old and sick could be cared for there and homes provided for those difficult cases of poverty that did not fit readily into any category, such as families awaiting removal, unmarried mothers and their children. On the surface, this might make the workhouse the 'dumping ground' for all the problem cases.⁽²⁾ In reality, the reports of Vestry visitors, workhouse Governors and the local sources, show them to have been institutions organised as reasonably as possible, given their multifarious functions.⁽³⁾

To avoid presenting a narrow picture of relief for the aged, in following the objectives of presenting this relief

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1. E.E. Butcher (ed.) Bristol Corporation of the Poor. Selected Records 1696-1834. Pub. Bristol Record Society. Vol.13. Court Books. p10 (1732)
 2. D. Marshall. Eighteenth Century Poor. oop. cit. p138 quoting John Scott (1773) and Dr. Trotter (1776)
 3. K.A.O. P406/12/30 Governors Reports 1767-1770 (Wrotham)
P110/18/7 Visitors Reports Dartford Workhouse (1733 ff)

as a network of provisions encompassing the efforts of the whole community, the research went beyond the confines of the Old Poor Law to look at other features. The abilities of the aged to help themselves in various ways were assessed and found to be a valuable addition to the basic provisions while the pensioner remained active. Attention was also given to the role played by the family in their support. While, legally, the family - sons, daughters and grandchildren, were supposed to maintain the aged, the demographic insights revealed by the research and, to a lesser extent economic conditions, showed that this was out of the question in the majority of families. The conclusion was that parishes had to support the old because most of their offspring had left the parish or were dead. Those few who remained often gave house-room to parents at parish expense.

Considerable time was spent assessing critically the conclusions of Professor W.K.Jordan, with respect to the importance and impact of the Kentish Charities on poverty. Two points must be stressed. Professor Jordan's studies terminated in 1640, which place them outside our period but, secondly, he has himself brought his conclusions firmly within the period 1660-1695 by his own statement that the flow of endowments up to 1640 had made such adequate provision that the problem of poverty in Kent had been solved for the next century or so. The great cultural and social change thus brought about freed the generality of men

from the spectre of hopeless poverty. This research has produced conclusions diametrically opposed to those of Jordan. The widespread poverty revealed by the Hearth Tax of 1664, and the whole subsequent history of the Old Poor Law, are, in themselves, sufficient proof of his mistaken conclusions about the role of charity. It has been shown in the text how little of the vast sums donated to charitable foundations actually trickled down to the real poor.

To sum up. This research has demonstrated that once the very poor survived the hazards of infancy and childhood, they stood a reasonable chance of surviving to old age. They were able to continue working to an age comparable with and often beyond their present day counterparts, in spite of poor food, poor housing and probably, at times, actual malnutrition. This exposes the fallacy of identifying a chronological age with a biological age, and both with compulsory termination of paid work. Like their counterparts in the twentieth century, the aged males did not long survive the loss of paid work and the reduced status which accompanied it. The ability of women to outlive men was just as much a feature in pre-industrial England as it is in the 1980's.

But behind all the apparent affluence of the twentieth century pensioner, there would seem to have been no real structural change in the way society treats its aged poor over three hundred years. Poverty in old age is relative to time and place, and while the living standards of the

average pensioner of today would seem like untold wealth to their earlier counterparts, they still remain outside the economic system, dependent on state handouts, denied access to adequate medical and surgical resources, purpose built homes and sufficient assistance of all kinds to meet their personal needs.

Attention is finally directed at some of the positive results achieved by this research. An innovation in poor law studies is the quantitative analysis of the pension assessments, which for the first time have made comparison of parish with parish a real possibility, and to relate them to the growing frailty of the pensioner and to food prices. A second quantitative innovation has been the introduction of a mechanism for discovering the real ages of pensioners who were born in other parishes. This may open the way for an extension of study of the aged in other parishes where similar problems will occur.

It has become clear in the light of the West Kent evidence, that the ways of relieving the aged, and by implication other categories of poor as well, were not haphazard, corrupt or cruel by the standards of the time. Pensions and charity have, perhaps, been displaced from their former central role. To these we may also add the workhouse. Attempts to set the aged to work and to sweeten the pill with payment, 'encouragement or pence money', were not necessarily an unenlightened or exploitive policy. It remains British social policy that work for the disabled, and occupational therapy for the feeble in mind and body,

are desirable, if not profitable, policies. In the case of the large and increasing numbers of elderly in our midst, it is a policy that could well be extended, being conducive to continued independence, role-playing and the maintenance of status.

APPENDIX A.1

PROJECTING AN APPROXIMATE AGE AT BURIAL USING

A 1-IN-5 SAMPLE OF TONBRIDGE PENSIONERS

THE PROBLEM

Out of 204 old 'pensioners' abstracted from the Overseers Accounts, the age of only 48, or just over 20%, were discovered by a search of the Baptismal Register. Coupled with another thirty individuals referred to as 'old', 'worn out' or 'aged', this made credible evidence for only 42% of the total number of pensioners. This was considered insufficient a proportion for statements made and conclusions reached about their treatment to be considered reliable.

A hypothesis was tested on a 1-in-5 sample of Tonbridge pensioners to increase the degree of confidence.

THE HYPOTHESIS

Statements made about the treatment of the aged would be much more reliable if an approximate age at burial could be estimated for those about whom no information about their ages can be found in parish records. Where this projected age is above sixty, it can be reliably certain that they belong with the group being discussed.

TESTING THE HYPOTHESIS

The date of burial is known for the majority of the pensioners and gives a fixed point in time. Where it is not known, the individual is ignored for the purpose of testing.

TEST I

This involves using a known date of first marriage. Historical demographers, using the technique of family reconstitution, have estimated that the mean age of first marriage in England over three centuries (1550-1870) varied only slightly above or below 25 for females and 2 to 3 years older for males.⁽¹⁾

Where a marriage date was found, and there was no confusion of identity, an age of 25 was allocated to the bride and 27 to the groom. By simple calculation, an age could be calculated using the date of burial, as in the following example:

Elizabeth Arrows Buried 1747

Married 1702

Calculated age at burial 70 years: (1747-1702+25)

By coincidence, Elizabeth Arrows is also entered in the Register of Baptisms which provides a check on the test. She was baptised in 1672 which gives an age of 75 years.

By working backwards to the year at which the pensioner first appears in the overseers accounts, an approximate age at which the pension was first received can also be established, and the length of the pension life.

It is acknowledged that the age of first marriage varied considerably from time to time and from place to place, above and below the mean used for this test. The age arrived at in this test may, therefore, vary by a number of

1. M. Flynn. European Demographic System. London 1981 p124
2. Wrigley and Schofield. Population History. op. cit.p261

years above or below the aged found at baptism. From the sample of pensioners appended, it can be seen that where checks can be used, the difference is seldom more than five years above or below the real age.

TEST II

In some cases, neither a date of baptism nor a date of first marriage could be traced. A similar test to Test I was devised using the first recorded date of baptism for a child of the marriage, making the assumption that the couple settled down in the parish shortly after marrying. It was also realised that the first recorded date found might not necessarily have been that of the first child. There could have been a baptism in another parish earlier, or there might have been a miscarriage or stillbirth. This was considered to be a slight advantage for the calculated age would then be lower than the true age.

It was also assumed, for the purpose of testing, that conception took place shortly after the marriage, and the birth of the first child took place when the mother was 26 and the father 28. Close study of the Tonbridge registers showed that, in fact, most marriages did not produce a child until eighteen to twenty-four months after the marriage.

By means of these two tests, carried out in all five parishes, for all the pensioners for whom case histories had been prepared, approximate ages for a further 20% were produced. This made the degree of reliability greatly improved with ages for 62% available.

TEST III

As a further check on the usefulness of the two tests used, the average age at burial, for those with a known age, was compared with the similar age for those pensioners for whom it had been computed. As the accompanying table shows, there was a fair degree of correspondence between the resulting average ages. (Table A1.1)

SAMPLE OF PENSIONERS USED TO TEST HYPOTHESES. RESULTS TABLED

Explanation of Abbreviations

BUR: Date of Burial

BAPT: Date Baptised

MAR: Date of Marriage

CHLD: Date of Baptism of
presumed first child

AGE BUR: True or calculated age at burial

(w): wife of person named above; (wid): widow

? after age e.g. 70? this is the age arrived at by using the
techniques devised for testing and may be either slightly
above or slightly below the real age

* indicates real age; may be compared sometimes with a
computed age for confirmation

The details for the compilation of this table were
taken from the Overseers Accounts for Tonbridge Parish

K.A.O. P371/12/1-6

Transcripts of Baptisms, Marriages and Burials for the same
parish

K.A.O. TR 2451/1-2

C 1553 - 1812

M 1547 - 1837

B 1547 - 1837

NAME	BUR	BAPT	MAR	CHLD	AGE	BUR	COMMENTS
NEVILL Francis	1675		1634		68?		called old
NEVILL Mary (w)	1681		1634		72?		
WISE Henry	1676		1643		60?		old
WISE Alice (w)	1687	1616	1643 (age 27)		71*		
MACE Alice (wid)	1695		1654		66?		
CARTER Thos.	1681			1640	69?		old
MARDEN Edw.	1691			1655	64?		
THORNTON Rd.	1681			1629	80?		old
THORNTON Ann(w)	1681			1629	78?		
ABRAHAMS Thos.	1694	1623			71*		Brother and
ABRAHAMS Eliz.	1712	1631			81*		two spinster
ABRAHAMS Mary	1711	1633			78*		sisters
DAWES Ann (wid)	1704	1630	1655		74*		and 74?
SAVAGE Henry	1706		1642		81?		
SAVAGE Joan(w)	1704		1642		77?		
RING Clement	1698		1654		71?		
BLUETT Ann(wid)	1712	1650	1670		62*		and 68?
DUNCK Mary(wid)	1712		1650		87?		relief 23 yrs
MANSER Eliz(wid)	1714		1676		63?		
THATCTER Ann	1708		1664		69?		
DAY Thos.	1713	1635			74*		
PICKHURST Jane	1715		1662	1662	78?		
SUMMERTON Brig.	1731	1665	1689		66*		and 67?
TOMKINS Gab.	1736		1687		76?		
PINSON Sarah	1768		1694		105		parish register
					99?		by calculation
NOAKES Mary	1743		1692		76?		
ARROWS Eliz.	1747	1672	1702		75*		and 70?
JARVIS Isab.	1751			1700	77?		
SMEAD Sarah	1767	1700	1725		67*		and 67?
CARTER Mary	1771			1728	70?		very old
							infirm
JEFFERY Sarah	1767		1722	1724	70?		
BISHOP John	1770			1710	89?		old, worn out
BETTS Ann	1773			1728	71?		old, worn out
LOVELACE Ann	1768		1723		70?		old, distress
HARVEY Eliz.	1775		?1733	1735	67?		poss. older
PIERCE Henry	1786	1711	1732		75*		and 81?
ASHBY John	1786		1732		81?		
ASHBY Mary (w)	1786		1732		79?		
CHAMBERS John	1803				88*		Burial Reg.
BOX Margaret	1752			1701	77?		
CLARK Eliz.	1784		1741	1743	68?		
GIBBONS Eliz.	1709		1664		70?		poss. older
PIERCE Eliz.	1769	1684	1703		85*		and 91?
LOMAS Lucy	1786		1731		80?		

Table A1.1

AVERAGE "REAL" AGES AT BURIAL COMPARED
WITH "COMPUTED" AVERAGE AGES

	NUMBER	AVERAGE	
COWDEN			
Real age	37	79.1	years
Computed	28	73.3	years
CRANBROOK			
Real age	75	75.3	years
Computed	72	71.0	years
MAIDSTONE			
Real age	126	75.5	years
Computed	127	73.6	years
TONBRIDGE			
Real age	75	75.3	years
Computed	72	71.0	years
WROTHAM			
Real age	65	72.3	years
Computed	63	73.5	years

APPENDIX A.2

RANDOM SAMPLE OF PENSIONERS' CASE HISTORIES

COWDEN

1. John Taylor and wife
2. Widow Terry
3. William Stanford and wife
4. James Hart

CRANBROOK

5. Richard Wimshurst
6. Old Scott and wife
7. Old Gore
8. Catherine Sheaf
9. Widow Colville
10. Widow Coombes

MAIDSTONE

11. Old Savage and wife
12. Old Cleave and wife
13. Edward Climpson and wife
14. Widow Twist
15. Edward Hawkins and widow

TONBRIDGE

16. Francis Nevill and wife
17. William Maynard and wife
18. Launcelot Watson
19. Robert Everest

WROTHAM

20. William Colgate and wife
21. Old John West
22. Widow Thornton

COWDEN 1. John Taylor and family

1733-1734 Paid John Taylor of Munfield(Sussex) for keeping
his father and mother for six and thirty weeks
£1.16.0

1734-1735 Paid him £1.11.0; 4d for wool and 3.0d for beer

1735-1736 For his father and mother £1.15.0 and £1.10.0

1736-1737 Old Taylor must have died this year, since:-

Paid him for his mother £1.6.6. added expense
of previous year suggestive of this

1737-1739 For keeping his mother for 90 weeks at sixpence
£2.5.0. Payments continued as above until 1742
when mother died

John Taylor reappears in 1764, now himself an old man

1764 September. Paid to the parish officers of Munfield
their expenses in coming to Cowden two several
times and the expense in bringing old John Taylor
with an order to bring him home £2.17.0.

Paid the old man for his journey and his expenses
to Cowden when he came since ye order 8.0d.

January 15 - August 12 1764/65. Paid old John
Taylor and his wife thirty weeks relief at 1s6d a
week £2.5.0.

Paid the expense of going to Munfield to settle
the accounts concerning him 13s.9d.

This old couple were allowed to stay in Munfield and were
paid a pension of 1s6d a week between them. The arrangement
continued until 1767 when John Taylor died and no more is
heard of the widow. No information in Registers.

COWDEN 2. Widow Terry

1687	12 weeks at 9d a week	9s0d
1688	48 weeks at 1s0d	£2.8.0.
1689	56 weeks at 1s0d	£2.16.0.
1690	Pension of 1s0d rising to 1s6d £3.8.0. in all 1s6d extra in sickness Removed to almshouse; from now on she received 100 faggots of wood each November and lived rent free. As was the Cowden custom, all her personal possessions, except for her clothing, became the property of the parish, and were immediately sold by auction.	
1691	56 weeks at 1s6d	£4.4.0
	cloth for a coat cloth for a change cloth for a waistcoat for making of above	
		£2.19.0. in all
1692	Pension £1.18.0 (22 weeks) Coffin 6s.0d Knell, grave and burial 11s3d Paid to Mrs. Osborne 2s8d; to Mrs Swane 9d; and Widow Wanmer 10d, for the goods and attention Widow Terry had of them in her sickness	

Not possible to identify her by name. Probably Anne, wife of William. If so, by calculation her age would be 75 at burial.

COWDEN 3. William Stanford and wife, Jone or Jane

1667 Relief 38 weeks at 1s0d a week £1.18.0

1668 Relief 4s0d a month £2.12.0. Acord of wood, 75
faggots, 1/2 bushell oats, 13s0d in all

1669 Thirteen months at 7s0d £4.11.0d
Wood and faggots 15s0d
1/2 bushell wheat; 1/2 bushell oats 2s0d

1670 61 weeks at 3s0d £9.3.0. 100 faggots 5s0d
Coffin for Wm. Stanfords wife, bread and beer,
burying her 11s0d
Paid Robert Tilly for tending William Sandford
7 weeks 5s0d
For making him a coat, britches and linings 3s6d
For laying out his wife 1s0d

1671 Pension at 4s0d a week; £8.5.0.
Paid for carrying him twice to Tilly's 2.6d

1672 Pension and attention £9.0.0 in all
Burying William Stanford 19s4d
William Stanford. born Cowden 1600. Died age
72. Jone Stanford no information

COWDEN 4. James Hart

- 1680-1689 Relief at times only referred to as Old Hart
presumed to be doing some work
- 1689 Becomes regular pensioner at 1s0d a week from
December. In all 16s0d and 6s0d extra in sickness
- 1690 Pension 8 weeks at 1s0d; 40 weeks at 1s6d
- 1691 Relief £2.2.8. Two shirts at 14d pence by the ell,
and making 7s8d. For attendance 6s0d. Washing of
his bed and clothes 1s0d. Coffin 5s6d. Laying him
forth and the affidavit 2s6d. For burying Old Hart
5s2d; for beer he had in his life time 6d.

James Hart outlived two wives

First wife died 1661, leaving him with two young
children. Married Elizabeth Jarrett 1664. She died
1684. James already in receipt of relief.
Estimated age at burial for James from use of
parish registers, 80 years.

CRANBROOK 5. Old Richard Wimshurst

1673 Paid John Miller rent for old Wimshurst 9s0d

1674 A load of wood 9s0d

1675 Relief 1s6d

1676 Old Blind Wimshurst and his child

May 11s6d September 11s6d

Pension from October 6s0d a month

A coat 6s0d (now aged 63)

1677 Pension 11s0d a month

1678 Pension 9s6d a month. Wood 10s0d

1679-1681 No pension, but an occasional load of wood,
clothing and payment of rent

1682 Pension 2s6d a month; rent wood and clothing

1683 Pension 4s0d a month; rent 16s0d

1684 Pension 6s0d. only 5s0d towards rent

1685-1688 No change (Age now 72 years)

1689 Pension 6s0d a month. Clothing 16s4d

1691 As above. more clothes 8s0d

1692-1693 As above. Buried January 1693/94

Not buried at parish expense. Age 81

Information from parish registers.

Baptised Nov.14th 1613

Married three times and outlived all wives

First wife, name unknown, buried 1666, outside
Cranbrook. Second wife, Dorothy Buckland married
1669. Died Nov. 1670 leaving young son, Stephen
Married third wife, Amy, within a few weeks. Amy
buried 1698

CRANBROOK 6. Old Scott and wife

- 1674 Relief March 1s0d. July gave him 6d to go to
Staplehurst on behalf of the parish
- 1675 Relief November 1s0d. Paid to cure his hands
2s0d
- 1676 Relief May 6d
- 1677 May. relief being sick 8s0d (now aged 69)
- 1678-1679 Ten shillings towards his rent
- 1680 Old Scott and his wife being sick;
Pension from December 1680-Feb 1681 4s0d a month
- 1681 Pension Feb-April 4s6d a month
Rent 10s0d. Wood 3s6d
Old Scott died April 1681. Aged 73 years. Burial
Charges 6s4d. Widow a pension of 6d a week until
she died in Nov. 1681
- John Scott born 1608. Married Alice Jefferie July 1631,
both aged twenty-three. Both aged 73 at burial

CRANBROOK 7. Old William Gore (alias Goore, Gowre, Gower)

1686 Sick. Relief 2s0d.

No additional relief until 1690

1690 A coat 11s0d. two changes 5s6d.

6d paid weekly for his rent and continued until
his death in 1696

1691 May. Sick Relief 6s0d. a change 3s0d. In want 2s0d

1692 May, in want 1s0d. June, in want 2s0d. Age approx
80. Pension from October 2s6d a month

1693 Pension 2s6d. Paid for a spade(August) 1s0d

1694 As above; a coat 7s6d

1695 As above; June a new spade 2s0d. July. contracted
smallpox and died. Burial fees 16s4d

Information from registers. Not born in Cranbrook. Married
Elizabeth Row in Nov. 1640 (age allocated 27). First wife
buried May 1654. Married Lettice Symonds June 1654. Lettice
buried 1680.

Approximate age at burial for Old Gore estimated to be 83.
All children had left the parish. Despite great age he was
working until one month before his death.

CRANBROOK 8. Catherine Sheaf

1682 First becomes a regular parish pensioner. Prior to this was in receipt of occasional relief mostly during sickness. Rent paid 15s0d a year. Pension 2s6d a month but only eleven times a year.

1683-1685 Pension as above

1686 Pension as before. Cards 2s0d

1687 As above

1688 Referred to as 'old' for first time. Age approx 65.

1689 Pension 2s6d. Wood 4s6d. Clothes 9s0d. Cards 2s0d

1690 Pension 2s6d

1691-92 Pension 3s0d

1693 Pension 3s0d until June. Moved into lodgings. June extra relief 11s0d, being sick and lame. July, pension increased to 4s0d. No further rent paid.

1694-95 Pension 4s0d (includes rent for lodgings)
June. Sick and died and Buried 7s6d
Paid tax 4s0d

From Cranbrook registers

Katherine Miller married Richard Sheaf 1648. Son Richard born 1649. Calculated age at burial 72.

CRANBROOK 9. Widow Colville

Already in receipt of pension when Cranbrook records begin.

- 1672 Pension 3s0d a month
Load of wood 10s0d. Rent £1.0.0.
- 1673 9 payments at 3s0d. 2 payments at 3s6d.
Rent £1.0.0.
- 1674 11 payments at 3s6d Rent £1.0.0. Her estimated
share of a load of wood bought for the poor 5s6d
- 1675 11 payments at 3s6d. Rent 18s0d. Has been moved
into cheaper house.
- 1676 11 payments of 4s0d increased because of sickness
No rent paid, not possible to discover where she
is now lodged.
- 1677 11 payments of 4s0d
- 1678 11 payments of 4s0d. A petticoat 10s0d. Wood 6s0d
- 1679 1 payment of 4s0d. Died January 1679.
Born Jane Wilding 1600; Buried age 78

CRANBROOK 10. Widow Coombes

- 1672 Pension 2s0d. 11 payments
- 1673 No pension; relief of 7s0d only
- 1674 3 payments of 2s6d. 3 payments of 3s0d.
3 payments of 3s.6d. Paid 6d towards a change
- 1675 1 payment of 2s0d; 10 payments of 3s0d
- 1676 10 payments of 3s0d. Sick. Total cost of sickness
and burial 9s0d.

Estimated age at burial 65

No other information available. Included to demonstrate
similarity of treatment for all ages; possible other
resources available since above relief not sufficient for
subsistence.

MAIDSTONE 11. Old Savage and wife

- 1671 Pension 1s0d weekly
- 1672/73 Pension 2s0d weekly
- 1674 52 weeks at 2s0d. 6 yards of kersey to make him
a coat 13s0d; making it 3s4d. 1 1/2 yards of
kersey for breeches; for bindings and pockets and
making 9s4d
- 1675 19 weeks at 2s0d
Paid Old Sam for Goodman Savage's coffin 5s0d
Goody Savage 32 weeks at 1s0d
- 1676/77 Pension continued at 1s0d weekly
- 1678 43 weeks at 1s0d. No further entries. Assumption
of death but no burial entry found.
Not possible to estimate age of either partner.

MAIDSTONE 12. Old Cleeve (or Cleave) and wife

Already in receipt of pensions when Maidstone records begin

- 1668 Pension 31 weeks at 2s0d; 24 weeks at 2s6d
In their sickness 8s0d.
- 1669 52 weeks at 2s6d. Shoes for Old Cleeve 4s0d
- 1670 55 weeks at 2s6d. In his sickness 3s0d
Paid more to old Cleeve in his sickness by the
Mayor's order 1s6d
- 1671 15 weeks at 2s6d; 24 weeks at 3s0d. Paid Goodwife
Baker for looking to Cleeve 5s0d. A coffin 5s0d.
Widow Cleeve. 4 weeks at 2s0d; 4 weeks at 2s6d
- 1672 Widow Cleeve. 6 weeks at 2s0d. 19 weeks at 3s0d.
23 weeks at 3s6d. To Elizabeth ffirebras for
looking to her in her sickness 6d weekly included
in pension. a change 3s0d. a coffin 5s0d. a grave
1s0d
Old John Cleeve. baptised 1595. Age at burial 76
Married Eliza Glover as second wife 1636. Age at
burial - her age estimated as well over 60.

MAIDSTONE 13. Old Edward Climpson

- 1695 55 weeks at 1s6d during smallpox
 Nursing in sickness for Goody Climpson £1.1.6.
 Died, Duty 4s0d.
- 1696-1700 Old Edward Climpson
 Pension 1s6d weekly
- 1701 Pension reduced to 1s0d weekly
- 1702 As above
- 1703 55 weeks at 2s0d. A shirt 3s6d
- 1704/5 Pension of 1s6d weekly
- 1706 Pension 1s6d
- 1707 Pension 1s6d. Shoes, shirt, stockings, greatcoat,
 britches £1.11.4
- 1708 Pension at 1s6d weekly
- 1709 41 weeks at 1s6d. 1 week at 2s6d. 8 weeks at 2s0d
 2 shirts. 1 pair sheets pair stockings Total 17s8d
 Allowed him more in sickness and to his daughter
 for looking after him at 6d a week. 10s6d in all
- 1710 In want. 30 weeks at 3s0d. In sickness 16s6d.
 Buried. Age 77

The fact that he was noted as being 'in want' during the last year of life, having already been a pensioner for several years requires some qualification.

1709/1710 were years of acute dearth in Kent, wheat prices in Maidstone reaching 80s shillings a quarter. All the poor were 'in want'.

MAIDSTONE 14. Widow Twist (Tuist)

- 1711 29 weeks at 1s6d; Paid in sickness 16s6d.
- 1712 45 weeks at 1s0d; 5 weeks at 2s6d
a gown, a petticoat and a wheel 13s0d
- 1713-15 Pension at 1s0d a week
- 1716 41 weeks at 1s0d; 14 weeks at 1s6d. In Sickness
for a nurse 7s0d.
No relief for two years
- 1719 3 weeks at 1s6d; 52 at 1s0d. two shifts 6s8d
petticoat and gown 13s2d; another petticoat 2s8d
- 1720 32 weeks at 1s0d
Removed to workhouse August 1720
Gap until 1723. Left of her own accord and was
never a pensioner again
- 1723 Relief 1s6d. Gown and petticoat 13s2d. Relief 1s6d
In want, given 1s0d twice. Lame and in want given
1s0d four times. Sick relief 12s6d; for nursing
12s6d
- 1724 5 weeks at 1s0d. 18 further payments of 1s0d and
one of 6d.
- 1725 Sick. Gave the woman that shifted her 3d. Possibly
to new lodgings?
Relief 1s0d. Strings to thread her apron 1s3d
4 further payments of 1s0d
Noted in accounts as being 'in want' on seven
occasions, given a shilling each time
- 1726 Clearly in great desperation. Noted as receiving
a few pence every two or three days from one or

other of the four overseers. 8 yards of linsey at
15 pence a yard 10s0d. making the gown and body
lining 2s0d.

Buried April 1726 aged about 71

Illustrates the strictness with which those elderly who
refused the benefits of the workhouse could be treated in
the early eighteenth century.

MAIDSTONE 15. Edward Hawkins and wife, Lydia

1763-64 Pension of 1s0d weekly
1765 Joint pension of 1s0d weekly for 9 months only
a shirt 3s0d; a shift 3s0d
1766-68 All relief cut. a shirt 3s3d
No further mention of Edward. Possibly died
age about 77 in 1769

Widow Hawkins

1769 Pension 1s0d weekly
1770 Pension 1s0d
1771 Pension 2s0d
1772 Pension 1s0d
1773 Pension 1s0d. a shift 3s0d
1774/75 Pension 1s6d weekly
1776 Pension 1s0d
1777 Pension 1s0d 7 months. Buried. Age 79

This case history shows the apparent parsimony of parishes in the late eighteenth century towards those old who were not taken into the workhouse. This is questionable:

1. Maidstone distributing large quantities of bread
2. From 1770 all parishes allowed to give regular relief as money food or grain. Overseers accounts also record purchases of considerable quantities of flour, rice and sometimes potatoes.
3. Mayor operated his own relief fund.
4. Doubtful if Widow Hawkins could have survived for eight years on the pension alone; with all these additional supportive services available both she and her husband lived to a 'ripe' old age.

TONBRIDGE 16. Francis Nevill and wife, Anne

- 1670 For relief at several times; a shirt and shoes
19s8d
- 1671 Relief. 17s0d
- 1672 Pension 2s0d a month. £1.4.0. Rent half year,
15s0d. Relief in sickness 2s0d
- 1673 2s0d a month for fourteen months. £1.8.0. Over
and above in sickness 6s0d. Extra relief 15s0d,
7s6d. Rent 15s0d.
- 1674 Pension for 10 months at 4s0d and for two months
and 2 weeks at 7s0d a month. £3.19.0. in all
- 1675 Paid for relief and attendance for Francis Nevill
'being visited by the smallpox' £6.5.0. Coffin
and winding sheet. 16s8d. Widow Neville, a pension
the 1st month 1s0d; the second month 2s0d; the
third month 3s0d and the last months at 1s6d a
month. No more rent paid. Widow in almshouse.
Paid her for attending her son in his sickness
2s0d. Shoes 2s0d; a change 2s9d; faggots(50) 6s0d
- 1676 Pension of 1s6d a month. Over and above at various
times 6s0d. Shoes 2s8d. linen cloth for her use
2s0d
- 1677 Pension of 1s6d a month. Over and above 1s6d.
3 ells of linen cloth 2s9d. apparell 8s6d. 100
faggots 14s6d.
- 1678 Pension 2s0d a month. A change 1s8d. Faggots 9s0d
Shoes 2s6d

- 1679 Pension. 2s0d for four months. 3s0d for nine months Linen 3s4d. faggots 9s0d. shoes 2s9d.
Cotton for a coat 4s6d.
- 1680 Paid Widow Nevill before her death at 3s0d a month for nine months and 4s0d a month for two months.
For a coffin 6s0d. For her attendance in sickness, burial cloth and fees 8s2d. Bread and beer at her funeral 2s0d. Spent on her before she died 3s9d.

Francis died aged approximately 70 years. Mary aged about 75. Neither born in parish or married there. They lived in close proximity to their son, also Francis, whose wife Anne died in the same smallpox infection as the old man. Widow Neville then cared at times for her three grandchildren, earning small sums.

TONBRIDGE 17. William Maynard, wife and son

- 1671 Relief. 5s0d in all. Referred to as Old Maynard
- 1672 Relief for him and his wife 11s0d. Faggots 11s0d
- 1673 Pension 4 months at 2s0d; 10 months at 3s0d. An iron kettle 2s6d. Towards a pair of shoes 1s0d. A coat 11s10d. A pair of britches 3s0d
- 1674 11 months lodging at 2s0d a month. A shirt 3s6d Relief at several times £1.3.4; £1.11.0. Faggots 5s0d; shoes, hose and faggots 7s0d. Cloth for a pair of britches and making 3s2d.
- 1675 No relief of any kind
- 1676 Pension to Old Maynard, 5 months at 4s0d; 9 months at 2s0d. Two shirts 6s2d. apparell 4s0d.
- 1677 9 months at 2s0d. 3 months at 2s6d. shoes 4s0d
- 1678 Pension at 2s0d a month. a purge 7d
- 1679 Pension 7 months at 2s0d; 1 month at 1s6d; 3 months 3s0d. Clothes for Old Maynard and britches 7s0d.
- 1680 Paid William Maynard at 3s0d amonth; 1 month more for the old man and his son (see note below) 8s0d Paid to him for his son's maintenance £1.5.0. For apparell and making for John Maynard £1.3.0. Four changes for them 13s6d
- 1681 For relief for William Maynard and his son £2.14.0d. Shoes for him 3s10d.
- 1682 Three months at 3s0d. 4 months at 4s0d. 2 months at 2s0d. More relief his wife being sick 2s0d.

- 1683 Pension. in all £1.19.0. (3s0d monthly) Apparell 19s6d. making coat and britches 3s0d. Shoes 3s10d extra in sickness 2s0d.
- 1684 Pension 3s0d a month. faggots 9s0d. Extra in sickness 2s0d. Paid towards his burial 15s6d. Old Maynard buried at approximate age of 78. Son John buried 1686 age unknown. Widow Maynard outlived her husband by 19 years dying aged 94 (approximately). See below. Parish lodged the sick son with his aged parents 1680

Widow Maynard

- 1684 Death of husband
- 1685 Pension £2.1.0. Over and above 4s0d.
- 1686 Pension 3s0d a month. Apparell 8s11 1/2d. Faggots 5s0d. Moved into an almshouse to share accommodation with Widow Medhurst.
- 1687-1690 Pension of 3s0d a month, extra in sickness £2.0.0. and 3s0d and 3s.6d. 150 faggots 15s0d.
- 1690-1700 (Ten years) Continues to receive the same pension. Regular wood in winter, about 50 faggots, occasional purchases of clothing and extra relief in sickness.
- 1700 Pension increased to 1s0d a week
- 1700-1704 No change
- 1704 Pension 4s0d a month. Terminal illness; extra relief 7s0d. Clerk and sexton at burial 3s2d Beer at the burial 6d. Age about 94 at burial.

TONBRIDGE 18. Launcelot Watson

- 1674 Paid for a bed, blanket and steddle for him.
 For relief and a change. £1.1.6 in all.
- 1675 A shirt 3s6d and relief 2s0d
- 1676 Apparell 5s10d
- 1677 Paid old Launcelot Watson to put him in stock
 (as a butcher) 16s0d. to buy him a sheep 10s0d
- 1678 For a shirt; relief at several times 12s6d
- 1679 For relief; for his burial and burial cloth
 15s0d.
- First wife buried 1644. Second wife buried 1680
- No information about her available.
- Old Watson about seventy at burial.

TONBRIDGE 19. Robert Everest

- 1673 Relief £2.8.0.
- 1674 Pension 4s0d a month; two changes 7s0d. Coat and
 making 19s0d. Rent £1.0.0. extra relief 2s0d
- 1675 Pension 4s0d a month. Rent £1.0.0. shoes 3s10d.
 Soling his shoes 1s2d. stockings 1s6d. A change
 and his washing 3s10d
- 1676 Pension 4s0d a month. Mending his clothes 3s4d.
 Shoes 2s8d. A years rent £2.10.0. Clothing £1.7.3.
 Making his clothes 2s6d. Wood 10s6d. Cloth for a
 coat 15s9d
- 1677 Pension 4s0d a month. Shoes 3s8d. making his coat
 7s6d. Linen and other apparell £1.2.6. Rent
 £2.5.0.
- 1678 Before his death four months at six shillings.
 Quarter's rent 11s6d.
 Died aged between 65 and 70

Relief is being given to Robert Everest at a much higher standard than to other pensioners. This is an example of the dual standards which occasionally are to be found; that of being more generous to their 'confreres'; those that had held parish office, were small traders but had fallen on hard times in old age.

WROTHAM 20. William Colgate and wife

- 1754 3 bushels of wheat 10s6d. 4 bushels of wheat 13s0d
 Money 14s0d; 12s0d
- 1755 Dame Colgate, by order of the Vestry 7s6d, 2s0d.
 William Colgate 17s6d
 2 bushels wheat 14s0d. money £2.4.0. possibly sick
- 1756 Relief on 7 occasions totalling £2.8.0.
 Lodging 4s0d. 1/2 bushel wheat 4s6d
- 1757 Relief on 12 occasions £2.14.0. 1/2 bushel flour
 5s8d. a shirt 3s8d. jacket and gloves 6s0d.
- 1758 Relief 6s10d. Paid Old Master Colgate a pension of
 1s0d a week. Paid him by order of Mr. Dallyson
 (local J.P.) 5s0d. Dame Colgate sick. Paid Dame
 Lawrence 2s6d for nursing her.
- 1759 Old Colgate pension of 1s0d weekly. Extra for Dame
 Colgate 9s0d
- 1760-1762 Pension of 1s0d a week
- 1763 Both sick with smallpox. Old William Colgate died.
 Relief £1.10.0. over and above pension.
 Dame Colgate removed to workhouse.
 Old William Colgate aged between 65 and 70 at
 burial. Widow Colgate died in workhouse 1770.
 Not possible to estimate her age; baptismal
 register has missing pages covering this date.

WROTHAM 21. Old John West

1652 Had pension of 5s0d a month. extra in money 2s0d

A suit 3s0d. a quarter's rent 12s6d (lodging)

1653-1658 Receiving pension and lodging money but no other
mention

1659 Considerable expense leading up to his death

Pension 8 months at 6s0d £2.8.0.

Half cord of wood 6s0d

Pension 3 months at 8s0d £1.4.0.

Paid for meat 9s0d. Extra relief 3s6d

Wood 1s6d. A suit 4s0d. A coat 10s6d, for
making 2s6d.

Materials for his burial 8s7d. Paid for his
lodgings 13s0d.

Entry in burial register

November 1659 Buried John West an old man near an
hundred years of age. No other information found.

WROTHAM 22. Widow Thornton (Wrotham Town)

- 1686 Pension 4s0d a month
- 1687 Pension 4s0d a month, shoes 3s0d, wood 10s0d
Wood 10s0d, 150 faggots 10s6d, more wood 5s6d
- 1688 Now moved to another dwelling in Nepicar (an
outlying district). Pension 6s0d a month. Wood
14s0d.
- 1689 Pay 6s0d a month. Paid Goody Collins for looking
to Widow Thornton 10s0d, 15s0d. Extra relief 4s0d
shift 3s6d; wood 6s0d
- 1690 Pension 4 months at 8s0d
Milk and butter in sickness 2s8d. Wood 4s0d.
Goody Collins for tending her £2.5.0.
Widow Berry for tending her £1.7.6., £1.5.0.
Coffin 7s6d. affidavit 1s0d; laying forth 2s0d
Concerning her funeral £1.2.0.
Henry Thornton married Elizabeth Swann, widow
1669. Her first husband Walter Swann died aged
80 in 1668. Difficult to compute her age but must
have been well over 80 at her burial.

The generosity with wood and attendance suggests great age.

Table A3.1

MAIDSTONE WHEAT PRICES
COMPARED WITH WINDSOR PRICES

Local prices in small quantities
(when available)

DATE	MAIDSTONE	WINDSOR	GALLON WHEAT	QUARTERN LOAF	
	s. d.	s. d.			
1705	28 0	30 0	6 $\frac{1}{4}$ d - 9d	6 $\frac{1}{2}$ d	Note Quartern loaf 1540 = 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ d
1706	26 0	26 0			
1707	26 0	28 6			
1708	26 0	41 6	1/0d - 1/1 $\frac{1}{2}$ d	11 $\frac{1}{4}$ d	Beveridge 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ d
1709	56 0	78 6			
1710	80 0	78 6			
1711	?	54 0			
1712	40 0	46 0			
1713	36 0	31 0			
1714	50 0	50 4			
1715	32 0	33 0			
1716	35 0	48 0			
1717	32 0	45 0			
1718	32 0	38 10			
1719	23 0	35 0			
1720	28 0	37 0			
1721	26 0	36 0			
1722	20 0	34 8			
1723	32 0	37 0			
1724	30 0	48 6			
1725	36 0	46 0			
1726	40 0	56 0			
1727	32 0	46 0			
1728	48 0	36 0			
1729	40 0	32 0			
1730	26 0	26 8	9d - 1/0d	4d - 5d	
1731	24 0	38 10	Gal flour 1/0d		
1732	22 0	23 0			
1733	26 0	40 4			
1734	31 0	38 0			
1735	37 0	38 4			
1736	30 0	35 6			
1737	30 0	38 6			
1738	30 0	50 8			
1739	32 0	34 10			
1740	46 0	34 0	5 $\frac{1}{2}$ d - 7d		

(contd.)

Table A3.1 contd.

DATE	MAIDSTONE	WINDSOR	GALLON WHEAT	QUARTERN LOAF
	s. d.	s. d.		
1741	34 0	34 10		
1742	22 0	24 10		
1743	20 0	27 6		
1744	21 0	24 10		
1745	23 0	27 6	5d - 6½d	
1746	36 0	39 0	8d - 1/1½d	
1747	29 0	34 0	1/1d - 1/2d	
1748	28 0	37 0	7d	
1749	30 0	37 0		
1750	30 0	32 6	6d	
1751	33 0	38 6	7d	
1752	34 0	41 10		
1753	40 0	44 8		4d
1754	30 0	43 8		
1755	26 0	33 10	1/0d	
1756	34 0	45 3	10d - 11d	10d
1757	32 6	60 0	2/3d - 2/6d	
1758	46 0	50 0		
1759	30 0	39 10		
1760	28 0	36 6		
1761	26 0	30 3		4 d
1762	32 0	39 0		
1763	33 0	40 9		
1764	34 0	46 9	8½d - 11d	6d
1765	48 0	54 0	10d	
1766	40 0	48 6		
1767	50 0	64 6		
1768	54 0	60 6		
1769	40 0	45 9		6d - 8d
1770	42 0	49 0		
1771	47 0	57 0		
1772	57 0	66 0		1/6d
1773	55 0	62 0		
1774	55 0	62 0		
1775	54 0	57 9		
1776	41 0	48 0		1/6d (Tooke)
1777	48 0	55 0		6d - 8d
1778	40 0	49 6		
1779	34 0	40 9		
1780	40 0	48 6		

(contd.)

Table A3.1 contd.

DATE	MAIDSTONE	WINDSOR	GALLON WHEAT	QUARTERN LOAF
	s. d.	s. d.		
1781	47 0	59 0		
1782			10d	5½d
1783				
1784				
1785				
1786				
1787				
1788				6d - 8d
1789				
1790				
1791		48 7		
1792		43 0		
1793	44 6	49 3		
1794	52 0	52 3		11d - 12d
1795	78 0	75 2		10½d - 1/2½d
1796		78 7		1/2½d
1797	44 6	53 9		1/2½d - 1/3d
1798		51 10		
1799		63 0	2/1d	1/1d
1800		43 0		1/3½d
1801		119 6		1/2½d
1802		69 6	1/1½d	

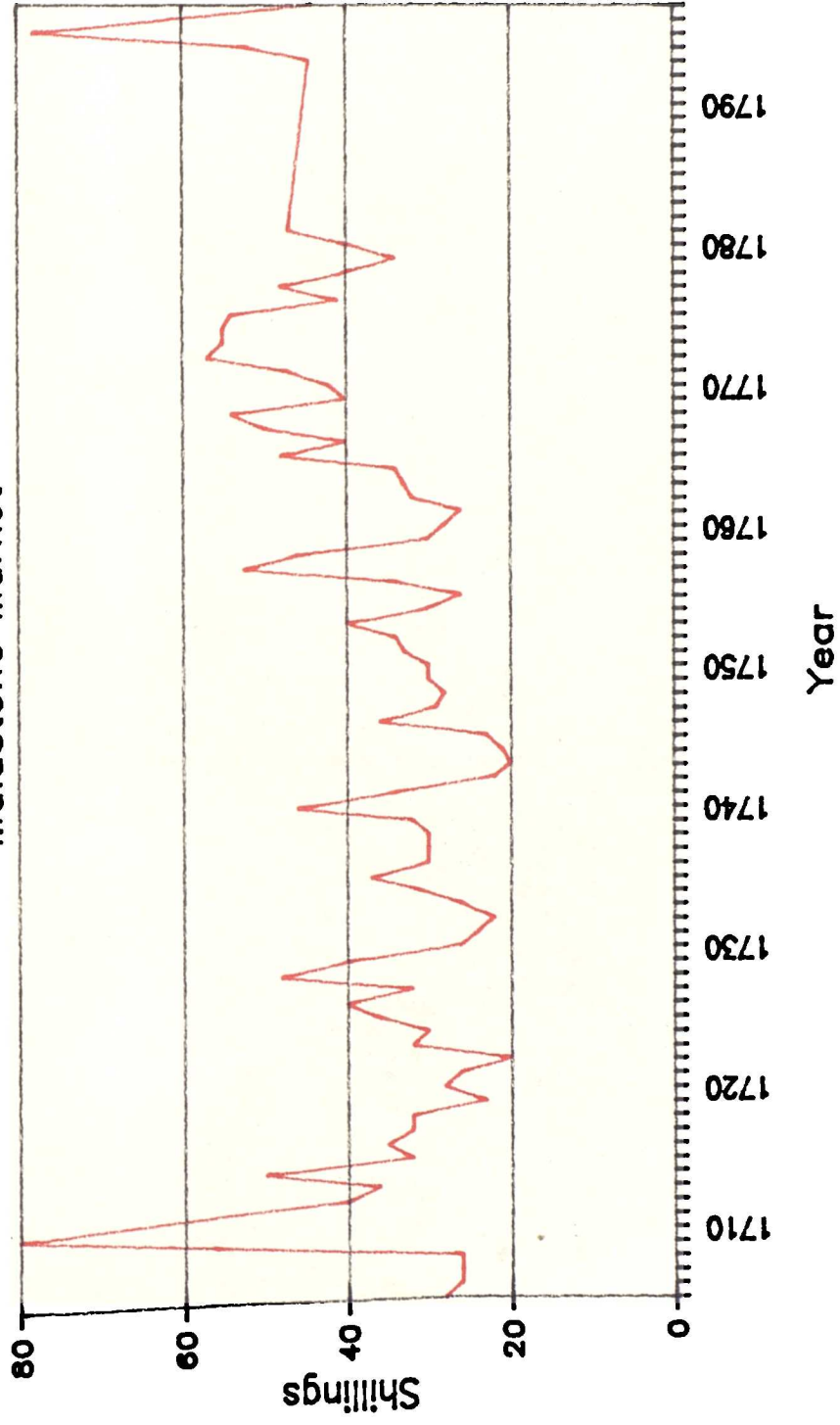
Sources: Maidstone Prices
K.A.O. Q/50.W7 - 11
West Kent Quarter Sessions Order Books

Windsor Prices
Sir William Beveridge, History of Prices

Others
Overseers Account Books
Wrotham Workhouse Account Books

Figure A3.1

WHEAT PRICES Maidstone Market



SOURCES. PRIMARY

MANUSCRIPT

OVERSEERS ACCOUNTS INCLUDING RATE BOOKS

COWDEN	[K]ent [A]rchives [O]ffice	99/12/1-2
CRANBROOK		K.A.O. P100/12/1-6
MAIDSTONE		K.A.O. P241/11/1-8
TONBRIDGE		K.A.O. P371/12/1-6
WROTHAM		K.A.O. P406/12/1-7

also the following:-

East Farley	K.A.O. P142/12/1-2
Headcorn	K.A.O. P181/11/1
Leigh	K.A.O. P223/12/1
Lenham	K.A.O. P224/12/1
Loose	K.A.O. P233/12/1-2
Chiddingstone	K.A.O. P 89/12/1
Shorne	K.A.O. P336/12/1/1
West Peckham	K.A.O. P285/12/1
Westerham	K.A.O. P383/11/1

CHURCHWARDENS ACCOUNTS (K.A.O.)

Cranbrook	P100/5/1-2
Chiddingstone	P 89/5/1
Tonbridge	P371/5/1-2

VESTRY MINUTES (K.A.O.)

Cranbrook	P100/8/1-2
Tonbridge	P371/8/1-2
East Farley	P142/8/1
Goudhurst	P157/8/1
Lenham	P224/8/1
Loose	P233/8/1-2

WORKHOUSE RECORDS (K.A.O.)

Dartford	P110/18/7
Farnborough	P 47/18/2
Wrotham	P406/12/17-30
Lenham	P224/18/6-11

PARISH REGISTER TRANSCRIPTS (K.A.O.)

Cowden	P 99/28/4
Cranbrook	TR/495/2-4
Tonbridge	TR/2451/1-2
Wrotham	TR/1303-1305

Original Registers housed at All Saints Parish Church,
Maidstone

QUARTER SESSIONS AND OTHER RECORDS IN K.A.O.

Quarter Sessions Order Books. Q/SO/W4-W12 (1680-1795)
Sessions Papers. Q/SB/11-40
Sessions Minute Books. Q S Ma W4-13 (1684-1835)
Tonbridge Petty Sessions. Minute Book PS/T (1766-1781)
Malling Petty Sessions. PS/Ma 1-3 (1747-1777)
Hearth Tax Returns (Kent 1664) QRT^h
Faversham Assize of Bread. Fa/Aa/30-38 (1750-1795)

Quarter Sessions and other Records (cont.)

Cowden. Agreement with doctor to minister to poor

P99/12/18

Maidstone Bread Book. P241/25/14-15

Maidstone Food and Medicine Vouchers. P241/12/4-34

Wrotham Food and Medicine Vouchers. P406/12/26-38

MISCELLANEOUS DOCUMENTS

Rochester Inventories

DRb/Pi/2/81 (1688) Launcelot Watson

DRb/Pi/1/12

DRa/Pi/10/20

Rochester Wills

John Petley. Roch. XXVI. 331^r (1703)

Elizabeth Clarke. Roch. XXV. 539^r (1680)

Elizabeth Walter. Roch. XXXI. f205 (1718)

George Hooper. Roch. XXXVI. f179

Others Transcripts. Maidstone Apprentice Rolls

(Maidstone Museum)

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Kent County Library Collection A54200

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